

# PARNELL

THE LAST FIVE YEARS

*Told from Within*

*By*

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"The Early Public Life of William Ewart Gladstone"



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# Parnell The Last Five Years

## I

### PARNELL AS FIRST KNOWN

PARLIAMENT has seldom, if ever, presented a greater array of dominating figures, from the personal as well as the political point of view, than on February 9th, 1888, when I entered the Lobby of the House of Commons for the first time, as the earliest accredited London Correspondent of the *Birmingham Daily Post*. Gladstone, as leader of the Home Rule Liberal Opposition, was waging in his seventy-ninth year a sustained and vigorous fight against a powerful Conservative Administration, headed by Lord Salisbury, rendered temporarily impregnable by the support of a strong Liberal Unionist contingent, led by Lord Hartington, now remembered as Duke of Devonshire, with Joseph Chamberlain as alert and aggressive chief-of-staff. Randolph Churchill was a detached figure, ready again to join a Government that for a year had done well without him, and growing steadily more angry with his old political friends because of their reluctance to receive back an un-

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repentant prodigal. Balfour and Goschen, very soon to be joined by Hicks-Beach, were in their best form on the Treasury Bench, as were William Harcourt and John Morley for the Liberal Opposition, with Labouchere below the gangway, a cynical and most acute Radical helper. But, even in this gallery of dominating figures, the sombre—as many thought, the sinister—figure of the Irish leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, was the observed of all.

It was a troubled political world. Within the previous twelvemonth, the parting of the Liberal ways on Home Rule had become complete ; and, while Gladstone held together the majority, with Harcourt and Morley as chief lieutenants, the minority were united, well-disciplined, and admirably led by Hartington and Chamberlain, the one heading the Whig Unionists, very fairly content with the situation, and the other retaining the Radical Unionists, several of whom were restive, with an occasional break-away. Parnell was undisputed chief of a solid Nationalist mass of 85 out of 103 of the members for Ireland, with such a strong Parliamentary body-guard as O'Brien, Dillon, Sexton, Healy, Justin McCarthy, John Redmond, and T. P. O'Connor—this last for an English constituency—all in their fighting prime. W. H. Smith was the simple-looking but wonderfully astute leader of the House of Commons, whose apparent mediocrity covered a shrewd tactician, his appearance and methods being a striking forerunner of a follower in the Commons' leadership a number

of years later, when Campbell-Bannerman surprised by his success all who had not closely observed his progress. Randolph Churchill hung uneasily on the Conservative flank, always hoping for an invitation to return to the Cabinet, though knowing Lord Salisbury's cynical question, when asked whether his revolting follower was once more coming in, "Did you ever know a man who had had a boil on his neck wish it back again?"

The political situation was as interesting as the leading actors. It was Ireland's first winter under the Crimes Act, as it was legally entitled, the Coercion Act, as it was commonly termed; and, while all Nationalists and some Liberals foamed about the political iniquities of "Bloody Balfour," the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists made merry over "O'Brien's Breeches." In truth, the Liberals, though in the first hey-day of enthusiastic belief in Home Rule, had been disappointed by what they considered the flippant fashion in which the Nationalists had conducted their winter campaign. The English Home Rulers had expected to see the police defied, and were shocked to find them merely dodged; and, though they could not but approve the prudence, they shrank from the cynicism of Parnell's rejoinder, when questioned why he did not cross to Ireland and join in the campaign, "My head is of far more use to the party unbroken here than broken there."

Among the acquaintances made that first night in the Lobby, the most remarkable of all was that of one

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whom I am now glad to recall—Charles Stewart Parnell. As far as the London Letter was concerned, all that immediately resulted was a mention that the Irish leader, “though still very pale and thin, assures enquirers that he is decidedly stronger than he was last year. He has been spending the winter in the South of England ; and, on his recent visit to Ireland, took cold, with consequent effect upon his voice ; but his spirits are buoyant, and his tone regarding the future in politics, as affecting Ireland, is remarkably confident.” This was the external view. How I regarded Parnell as a person at the moment of first meeting was privately noted.

Parnell at that time was taking pains to conciliate opinion in England and Scotland alike. In the session then opening, he was desirous to have made plain to the public generally a relatively trifling episode in the Commons which might have created an unfavourable impression outside. He consequently adopted what was for him the very unusual, if not unprecedented, course of dictating a long letter to the Press Association for immediate communication to every British newspaper, signing it in full, “Charles Stewart Parnell,” the only complete autograph of his I have seen. And his desire to stand well with the Scottish people was shown early in the session of 1889, when, in a Lobby talk, he told me that the first time in his Parliamentary life he had ever paired was that night, and in favour of Scottish Home Rule. I remarked, “That’s quite falling into line with English party

practice." "It seems to," he rejoined; and, when I added that the debate was proving very flat, he observed, "Scottish Home Rule is an academic question." "But the Irish have made theirs different," I continued; and he replied, "The circumstances are not like ours." He did not wish to argue the difference, but he wanted to make a favourable gesture to the Liberals of Scotland.

Joseph Chamberlain being abroad when the Session began, the most interesting Lobby figures in the then luridly burning Home Rule blaze were, beyond Parnell, his active lieutenants. A very early opportunity was given for close touch with three of the most talked about—William O'Brien, Michael Davitt, not yet allowed to sit in the Commons, and John Dillon; and a more general acquaintance with a further three, T. M. Healy, first Governor-General of the Irish Free State, Thomas Sexton, and Justin McCarthy. O'Brien—who, two years later, gave me an autographed copy of "When we were Boys," his semi-autobiographical tale, "with all his best wishes"—I first met on the evening he had returned from Hyères. Thither he had gone to recruit his health after release from Tullamore Gaol, with its tragi-comedy of the once-famous "breeches." His lungs had troubled him in prison, but were strong again, and the one remaining ill-effect was internal disorganization; "only," he quickly put in, "don't mention that, for my opponents distort everything I say or do." Showing himself confident of ultimate, and perhaps speedy, success,

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he feared no warrants being executed against him as long as he kept out of Ireland. So to keep him was, he thought, the Government's aim ; but smilingly he added that already he could be gaoled for 400 years in cumulative sentences under the Crimes Act, "which would carry me well into the twenty-fourth century, and I don't think they could insure me for so long." At that time I had not heard him in the Commons, and the note was made, "He is very quiet-spoken and earnest in his style, and made himself very agreeable." In conversation, I found all these qualities to the close of his Parliamentary career ; but, when speaking or writing, the quiet was often to seek, though the earnestness was always unmistakable.

The following evening I gained an introduction, through my Hackney member, Professor Stuart, to Michael Davitt, who had just come from the Distinguished Strangers' Gallery, where he and Archbishop Croke had been listening to the debate on Parnell's Irish amendment to the Address. Davitt, recalling in grimly smiling saturnine cast of feature, style, and temperament some far-back Spanish strain, showed friendly feeling from the first. This, he explained, was because my paper, though strongly differing, had always treated him with courtesy and fairness. In the midst of serious political talk he gave a quaint illustration of Irish public life. The Nationalist *bête noire* at that moment, next to the Chief Secretary, Arthur Balfour, was his principal

legal henchman, Peter O'Brien, the Irish Attorney-General, popularly nicknamed "Pether the Packer" from his accustomed manner of dealing with the jury-box. According to Davitt, this Law Officer, like other struggling Dublin barristers who later became office-holding Unionists, had begun as an ardent Nationalist. In that rôle, he powerfully appealed to a jury not to convict T. D. Sullivan, author of "God Save Ireland," T. M. Healy's father-in-law, and the head of the "Bantry Gang," savagely denounced in later days by the adherents of Parnell. So passionately pathetic was O'Brien as advocate that he even shed tears, and, on sitting down, whispered to Davitt, "How do you think I did that?" "What I thought," said to me the dour Davitt, "was that next to landlordism as a curse in Ireland came lawyerism." A particular hope was added in this first talk to me that the Government would arrest a few Nationalist bishops, as nothing would strengthen the Home Rule movement as much; "but I am afraid Ministers will not be so mad," and this doubt was justified. "Davitt," I that night noted, "is a dark, striking-looking man, with a touch of added grimness because of the lack of the right arm; and he spoke with a quiet earnestness which was telling." A prophecy of his should be recalled. Once he had dreamed of an Ireland politically independent of England; but he did not then foresee that the two peoples would become friendly. In the changed circumstances and feelings because of Mr. Gladstone's action, he foresaw that, as Ireland

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must always be mainly an agricultural country and want a near and immediate customer, a combined union of interests was certain to be maintained. The time has now come for the prophecy to be fulfilled.

It chanced that, only a few minutes later, I was introduced to Dillon, just returned from the South of France with O'Brien. This was by T. P. O'Connor, then an ebullient young Nationalist and now "Father of the House of Commons." "T.P.," who had just launched the *Star*, was an old acquaintance, who had been specially friendly from the moment of my Lobby entrance, and remained so until and after my exit. Dillon I privately noted as very grave and self-contained—even of a somewhat more grave cast than Davitt ; but in both appeared to me an unmistakable ring of earnestness and confidence. He said one thing I recalled thirty years later when dealing with the opposing Irish section. The Government, he declared, could not depend on its agents in Ireland from top to bottom of the administration ; and at Tullamore Gaol police were employed to watch the warders, and spies to watch the police. This confirmed the experience of my brother-in-law and colleague, Pitt, afterwards so long and well known as "Pitt of the *Times*," who had been in Ireland the previous autumn for the Press Association. "In fact, we know everything that goes on," exclaimed Dillon in the spring of 1888, under the Salisbury Premiership. Almost the very words were uttered



to me by one of the best known and most trusted Unionist leaders at the critical moment of "the Curragh incident" in the spring of 1914, under the Asquith Premiership. And, in each case, confidential particulars of a startling kind were given in proof.

In one of my talks with Parnell that spring, he gave some interesting particulars of his earlier years in Parliament, when training himself successfully to pursue the policy of obstruction, and of his political endeavours when detained through the winter of 1881 as one of Forster's *mauvais sujets* in Kilmainham. I asked him one Monday evening whether it was true, as had been stated, that he had spent the whole of his Easter recess at the House. He smilingly observed, "Surely it isn't suggested that I was intending to blow it up." I assured him in the negative, but added that some mystery had been made of the matter. "There is no mystery at all in it," he rejoined; "I was engaged in drafting the Land Bill which Blane [the Nationalist member for South Armagh] will introduce on Wednesday, and which I only completed on Friday night. I have always found the recess the best time for working in the Library here. In 1876 and 1877, for instance [he had just entered Parliament in the autumn of 1875, and systematic obstruction by Biggar and himself began in the following year], I spent the whole of the Easter and the Whitsuntide recess in the Library. I couldn't do it now, for my strength would not allow it, and besides

there isn't the same necessity. As to the Land Bill itself, it is principally the remains of one I drafted when I was in Kilmainham in the spring of 1882. Maurice Healy younger brother of the more formidable Timothy, and Parnell's Nationalist colleague for Cork], who was a clerk to McGeagh, my solicitor, assisted me in the work, he bringing into the prison certain books and documents which I required ; and such was the state of terrorism that then existed that he was in danger himself of being arrested because he came frequently to see me."

Parnell then furnished a sketch of how that original Bill had subsequently been dealt with ; and, in this and other conversations, he gave me an opinion of his political powers entirely different from that formed by John Morley. That politician, long semi-officially associated with him, recorded in later years that " of constructive faculty Parnell never showed a trace. He was a man of temperament, of will, of authority, of power ; not of ideas or ideals, or knowledge, or political maxims, or even of practical reason in its higher senses, as Hamilton, Madison, or Jefferson had practical reason. But he knew what he wanted." Yet, if Morley had trusted his temper to give in his " Reminiscences " a considered opinion of Mr. Lloyd George, which everyone interested in our modern politics would much have liked to read, he would have said precisely the same. The later, like that earlier, great politician, " knew what he wanted."

It was theirs to find the framework ; it was for others to fill in the bricks. Even the very names of the great politico-philosophers who were the Fathers of the American Constitution meant as little to Parnell and Lloyd George, when essaying a difficult and sometimes dangerous task, as they do to the average member of Congress at Washington to-day.

The association of Alexander Blane with Parnell in this particular Land Bill suggested a study in personal contrasts. Parnell, tall and of stately bearing, was always fastidiously dressed, and often wore a flower, the sentimental reason for which was at the moment unexplained, but in fact was its presentation by Mrs. O'Shea, afterwards his wife. This was the scrupulously clad man whose chosen companion in an important political matter was the one member of his party who looked his worst in new clothes. Clumsily, though not heavily, built, Blane never seemed to secure a suit that fitted, and when it was at its freshest it looked its worst. This he so little realized that, when anxiously desired in the Lobby one evening by a spruce young Conservative to give the name of his tailor, Blane gladly furnished that of one in his own locality, for whom he fondly thought he had secured a profitable customer. It was an innocent delusion ; but those who watched the ungainly man striding through the corridors could not fail to be impressed by his sincere and almost dog-like devotion to his chief, a devotion which appealed to the not

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easily aroused sentiment of Parnell. It remained unshaken through the desperate struggle which ruined the leader, and secured the follower's own overwhelming defeat a few months later in South Armagh.

## II

### AT CLOSE HAND

**P**ARNELL at this period gave every appearance of the haughty, aloof, resolutely reserved man, who could fall into a cold and deadly rage when provoked; could sink almost into hysteria when roused to sudden passion; but could restrain himself in moments of keenest provocation or greatest pride with a rigidity I have never seen in any other public man. There have been many portraits of him—some idealizing, others commonizing, most commonplace; but the only one which brings back to vivid memory the man as he actually presented himself to Parliament was a coloured cartoon which appeared about this time in "Vanity Fair"; and this, taking him in a nonchalant, hand-in-the-pocket attitude, as if chatting to one he could trust, shows Parnell to the life. It even gives a hint of the singular power of his eyes—by far his most striking feature. His widow, long after his death, wrote, "The shadows under his deep sombre eyes made them appear larger than they were, and the eyes themselves were the most striking feature of his cold, handsome face. They

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were a deep brown, with no apparent unusualness about them except an odd compulsion and insistence in their direct gaze that, while giving the impression that he was looking through and beyond them, bent men unconsciously to his will. But when moved by strong feeling a thousand little fires seemed to burn and flicker in the sombre depths, and his cold, inscrutable expression gave way to a storm of feeling that held one spellbound by its utter unexpectedness." The description is a good one. The most magnificent eye into which it has ever been my privilege to look was Gladstone's, which was so gloriously piercing that, as one of his Ministers observed to me, "It's impossible, when once he has fixed you, to tell him a lie." But Parnell's eye had the fascination of the mesmerist's ; and, when he was roused, the yellow glints that glanced again and again across them seemed like the emission of sparks, and always suggested to me incipient traces of mental disorder, held in leash only by the exercise of indomitable will.

As that first session of 1888 wore on, the long struggles over the Local Government Bill establishing the County Council system and an obstinately contested Goschen Budget proposal for a wheel and van tax culminated in a desperate fight on the Charges and Allegations Bill, which was designed to set up a Special Commission of three judges to inquire into the truth of a *Times*' pamphlet challengingly entitled, "Parnellism and Crime." At that moment, the bitterness of party conflict had developed to a dismal

degree ; and even customarily honourable men did not hesitate, in their heated partisanship, to circulate mean and disgusting slanders on political opponents. One slander, which more merited the term malevolent, very nearly involved a breach of my confidential relations with Parnell, almost daily growing deeper. I one night was assured by a high Unionist authority that the determining influence to induce a divided Cabinet to bring in the Bill was the discovery of the counterfoil of a cheque signed by the Irish chief for the purchase of the knives with which were perpetrated the Phoenix Park murders of Lord Frederick Cavendish and Robert Burke. Accepting the authority as absolute, I risked the statement. The following afternoon, Parnell in the Lobby, with a quiet anger which deeply thrilled, denounced the assertion as wickedly baseless, stating circumstances which proved it to be so ; and he said he would at once proceed against the *Birmingham Post* for criminal libel, unless he had the name of my informant. I told him plainly that, while willing promptly to give as much prominence to his denial as to the original statement, with an expression of honest regret for having been misled, I would, at any cost, stand by the rule of my journalistic life—never to reveal the source of confidential information. As, however, it was plain he believed the charge came direct from Chamberlain, at whom he would dearly have liked to get, I went so far as to give the assurance that this was not the case, but no farther. He reflected for several moments, and

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then said, " I fully trust you. If it weren't for that, I would go ahead at once. Say it isn't true, and I'll be satisfied. But next time you hear me charged, give me a chance before publishing." It only remains to be observed on the general question that, in spite of many difficulties, I stood firmly throughout my journalistic career of half-a-century to the rule stated to Parnell ; and on the particular that, in the course of his cross-examination the next year before the Special Commission, a maladroit endeavour was made to revive this slander about the relation between his cheque and the murderous knives, and that it hopelessly broke down.

A more pleasant Parnell memory is linked with this period. At the opening at Olympia in the June of 1888 of an Irish Exhibition, in which, despite the heated feelings of the moment, all parties joined, I had a long chat with Parnell, who, unlike his accustomed habit, was clad in a light suit with white flower in buttonhole, and was the observed of all. He had just been having a friendly talk with Sir John Pope-Hennessy, a former Irish member and ex-Colonial Governor, who, in the troubled time of two years after, was to deal him his first fatal electoral blow. I asked Parnell why he had not fulfilled his intention to exhibit, and he explained that the principal industrial production on his Irish estate was granite setts, which did not lend themselves to show. It was true that, in an Irish Exhibition in Dublin seven years before, he had placed a cross carved from his quarries ;



but, as there was then no lathe in Ireland of the required kind, and the artistic part had to be executed at Aberdeen, he did not regard it as sufficiently representative of his country to show in London. The happy omen of returning concord at the opening of the "Hiberneries," when the Unionist Lord Mayor of London and the Nationalist Lord Mayor of Dublin—then Thomas Sexton—walked in procession side by side, and Unionist, Liberal, and Nationalist members worked amicably together on the Executive Committee, was not for long. In the Commons, Conservatives and Liberal Unionists were being brought more and more into accord, though fusion was not yet. The Liberals, while mainly keeping in step, were distracted by the efforts of a Radical Committee, in which Henry Labouchere and Philip Stanhope were active, to stimulate the Gladstonian leaders to greater liveliness. The one party which stood solid was the Nationalist, ruled, rather than led, by Parnell. It is difficult to convey to present-day politicians a full sense of the iron discipline he enforced on a naturally intractable section. This was not only from his subtlety in tactics, but by sheer dominance of character and will. Parnell never forgot—and, though the reminder was unspoken, never allowed his followers to forget—that he was of Cambridge; and he insisted on being approached without familiarity. In a party which knew each other as Tim or Mick, Pat or Danny, the leader was never otherwise addressed than "Mr." One night, after an excitingly close

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division wherein, by clever tactics, the Nationalists had run the Government hard, a trusted but exuberant follower exclaimed joyfully to his imperturbable chief, as they came from the House, "We did that well, Parnell." "*Mr. Parnell*," frigidly corrected his leader, as he strode away.

Parnell, indeed, never lost an opportunity to assert and even enforce his leadership on an innately troublesome flock. Some Nationalist members in the summer of 1888, without first approaching their chief, devised a dinner to welcome the colleagues who had been imprisoned under the Crimes Act. On hearing of the project, Parnell insisted, to their great annoyance, on taking the lead. "Of course," he told me, "my request was granted, and it is I who have signed the invitations." He carried out this idea in great things and in small. Noting that Chamberlain was always at his very best when interrupted, and scored most heavily off the Irish members when they angrily interjected, Parnell at a party meeting peremptorily ordered them to sit silent, whatever their most determined opponent might say. The first time this order was acted on was unforgettable. Chamberlain was plainly taken aback when the Nationalists quietly received every gibe and flout and jeer. He was the most skilful angler for an interruption, with the certainty of striking the interrupter a deadly blow as soon as he rose to the lure, the House of Commons has ever known. But now he threw the lure in vain, and ended his speech ineffectively. As long as Parnell

was the unchallenged Irish leader, the rule of silence held. When his rod was broken and interruptions were renewed, Chamberlain again and again made up for lost time, and, so wounding his man by subtle imputation as to make him cry out, promptly poured acid into the wound, and sent him away writhing and sometimes in custody of the Serjeant-at-Arms.

More than once, Parnell at night strolled with me up and down the Thames Embankment, between Westminster and Charing Cross, discoursing on affairs at a length that in the Lobby would have attracted too much regard. Despite the extreme reticence he was accustomed to display in conversation, he would talk with great freedom to anyone who had won his confidence. During the four years of our frequent intercourse, at times of great moment to himself personally as well as to his public career, I never found him anything but perfectly courteous, and sometimes strangely communicative. Much that he said was told on the implied understanding that it should not at the time be journalistically used. "It is for guidance," he more than once observed, "not for publication"; and the bond of confidence was never loosed. One could not talk to him often without observing that in his cool moments—and his conversational moments were not always cool—he weighed his words with much deliberation, and obviously chose the precise terms he wished remembered. An instance was given one evening when I asked him whether the statement of an Irish Liberal Unionist

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journal was correct that, recognizing the impossibility of obtaining a separate Parliament for Ireland, he was considering a scheme of Provincial Councils—a favourite idea of Joseph Chamberlain. “I know nothing whatever of it,” he replied, “and I thought that idea was exploded long ago. No such proposition has been submitted to me, and I should have rejected it even if it had been. I stand fast by Mr. Gladstone’s Bill.” But here he checked himself, and said, “I stand fast by the principle of Mr. Gladstone’s Bill of 1886, and have not changed.”

Occasionally, his talk would take a reminiscent turn ; and once this bore on a point which marked the beginning of his Parliamentary fame—or, as for this particular moment it can better be described, notoriety. His earliest efforts were as the close coadjutor of Joseph Gillis Biggar in the work of systematic obstruction, and this work was a combination of Parnell’s subtlety and Biggar’s thick-skinnedness. The subtlety was strengthened by a remarkably close study of the rules of the House of Commons, made for the purpose of scientifically organizing obstruction, at a time those rules were of a singularly amorphous kind. When in 1888 I questioned him as to a rumour that the Nationalist members intended to raise the question of Irish Home Rule on the second reading of the English Local Government Bill, he stated that, while this was incorrect, they might do so on an instruction to Committee, “if the rules would allow.” I expressed surprise that one who was thought to know the rules

so well should have any doubt on the point, and he rejoined, "All I ever knew was from practice. When I entered the House, most of the rules regulating debate were simply unwritten customs, and there were very few written rules. Since then, and especially during the last two sessions, a large number of new rules have been made touching the conduct of debate; and these, I admit, I have not studied like I did the old ones."

In the course of the more private talks he spoke with the utmost freedom of his political colleagues at St. Stephen's and his clerical supporters in Ireland; and he showed a very poor opinion of the tactical qualities of most of them. More than once he expressed distaste for the methods some of his followers adopted when assailing Chamberlain. He told me, when walking along the Embankment to Westminster one night, how deeply he regretted that the violent language of "United Ireland" and some of its adherents had assisted to prevent Chamberlain fulfilling his intention to make a political tour in Ireland in the autumn of 1885. He had good reason to know how favourable the English statesman at that time was to a very wide extension of local self-government in Ireland, and what at that moment might have been hoped from him—hopes checked by scurrilous attacks of a nature impossible to forgive. For long after that Parnell hoped it might be possible to come to an accommodation with Chamberlain which, beginning with a settlement of the then apparently interminable

land difficulty, would lead to an amicable arrangement all round. But the turbulent spirits around him would not permit of this ; and once, when one of his leading followers, speaking in Birmingham, attributed some astonishing political, but obviously not public, utterance to Chamberlain, Parnell frigidly observed to me that, even if the story were well founded, he had no great love for the use of private conversations on public platforms.

Parnell's distrust of clerical intervention in political tactics was once markedly revealed. In June, 1890, while still holding the undisputed Irish leadership, he conducted a very keen and sustained fight against the Local Taxation (Customs) Bill, embodying certain licensing proposals comprised in a Goschen Budget. He was particularly pleased one evening, when, working with the Liberals, he brought down the Ministerial majority to a third of its normal size. But, when I again met him in the Commons' telegraph office in the outer lobby, just as he was dispatching a message, he was in a highly angry state. " Look at this ! " he said, showing me a copy of the *Dublin Freeman's Journal*, containing an expression of editorial opinion that the division might have been much better but for the slackness of the Nationalist party. " That's inspired by Archbishop Walsh," he bitterly exclaimed. " Why won't these priests leave politics to politicians? They never interfere but they make mischief." He was very soon to realize how much mischief they were both able and willing to make for him.

I wondered why he had singled out the Dublin archbishop as having inspired the attack ; and it is at least a coincidence, of which he was aware, but with which I was at the moment unacquainted, that, just a day before its publication, there had appeared a full report in the *Freeman's Journal* of the speeches made at the marriage in London of William O'Brien, whereat Parnell pointedly showed the poor opinion he entertained of Irish ecclesiastics who rendered lukewarm lip-service to Nationalism, but only when it was successful. The ceremony had been performed by Archbishop Croke, of Cashel, one of the strongest supporters of the Land League throughout the agitation, even when the Vatican had frowned upon it, and the first promoter of the National Tribute to Parnell, which realized £40,000. And the Irish leader, at the then still-fashionable wedding breakfast, in giving that prelate's health, observed, amid loud cheering, that "he has never been afraid of standing alone in the most advanced position. It is easy for the most distinguished Irish ecclesiastic now to be an Irish Nationalist, but, in the days when His Grace gave sanctuary to Irish Nationality, it was not so easy for an Irish priest to do his duty by his countrymen." And Dr. Walsh could not fail to have seen the implication of the compliment.

But Parnell was far too cautious to put in print what he had said in private ; and, when he took the unusual course of immediately writing to the *Freeman's Journal*, and protesting against its comments as having

“ given pain and being likely to create misapprehension ”—though it had been flattering to himself personally—he kept strictly to the paper and let the prelate alone. That the incident stimulated him to renewed exertion, however, was shown within the immediately following week. He arranged with Labouchere for a “ snap ” division on the very first clause of the Local Taxation Bill. This had been moved, and the debate upon it adjourned until the Gold Cup day at Ascot, a fashionable function attended that fine June afternoon by a large proportion of the Ministerialist majority. When the debate was resumed in the normal course, the division was not expected on the Treasury bench before half-past six, by which time they would all be back. But, to the undisguised dismay of the Government Whips, the combined Liberals and Nationalists, who had quietly brought up their every man, did not seek to continue the discussion, and at once challenged a vote. At that moment, as was known to the Whips on both sides, the Ministerialists were in a minority ; but the three minutes allowed for the ringing of the division bells just saved the situation. Even the stolid Hartington hurried in at an unprecedented pace, while the portly Chaplin, then a Minister, wasted pounds in weight in his haste to enter. As a result, the Government was rescued, but by no more than four ; and it would have lost the division if one foolish follower of Parnell had not failed to heed his leader’s injunction to be silent, and persisted in putting two questions



too many. Even as it was, the organizers of the "snap" were satisfied to have given Ministers a bad shake; and this time there were no murmurs in any Nationalist quarter about the tactics of their chief.

Occasionally, Parnell seemed to realize that, unless the listener was most fully to be trusted, his freedom of utterance might provoke an explosion, disastrous to his party as well as to himself. Once he revealed this realization. In a lull in one Lobby conversation, he broodingly looked at me, and suddenly said, "Robbins, do you know why I trust you so absolutely?" The question did not admit of easy reply, but, scarcely pausing, he himself supplied the answer, "Because you never leak." I lived my journalistic life striving to continue deserving the highest compliment a Lobbyist, as I conceived him, could be paid; and on one occasion I described it as such, in an address nearly twenty years later to the students of Trinity College, Dublin, an overwhelmingly Unionist institution wherein never before had Parnell been quoted as an Irish authority of whom one should be proud. Strangely enough, he fully trusted only two English journalists—my brother-in-law Pitt and myself, and not more, I believe, than a single Irish one; and it was the more strange in my case as I represented a newspaper absolutely opposed to his Irish policy. But he knew that what he said for publication would by each of us be fairly and faithfully presented, and that what he said for guidance and not for print—and this in difficult situations was most

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valuable—would never be revealed. All this was the means of drawing Parnell into a relation of confidence, which never ceased until his death. Throughout that relationship I never found him once to deviate in the slightest degree from the strict line of truth. It need not be claimed that he told me the whole truth. What man in public life has ever told that to another—or even to himself? But, looking back over the full tale of his confidences, I am assured, from immediate knowledge and subsequent proof, that at no time did he ever tell me anything but the truth ; and that is very much to say.

It is, perhaps, the more to say because my experience seems very greatly to have differed from that of some extremely shrewd observers who for years were in close contact with Parnell—observers as shrewd as Joseph Chamberlain, Randolph Churchill, T. M. Healy, and Henry Labouchere. “Parnell,” Chamberlain bluntly told Labouchere in October, 1885—the critical moment just before the first General Election under an extended suffrage which precipitated the introduction of Home Rule—“cannot be depended on to keep any bargain.” This was part of a letter replying to one from Labouchere, who had said, “Randolph [with whom he had spent the previous morning] complained to me that it was impossible to trust Parnell.” A very few days later, Chamberlain again said to Labouchere, “It is impossible to depend on Parnell,” and, just a month afterwards, “Parnell has intentionally deceived some of his own friends.

I really think he will force us all, Radicals and Liberals, to reject all arrangements with him." Healy's opinion varied with the days. In a long talk with Labouchere in the December of this critical year, Healy told him—though the hearer admitted he recorded it in summarized form—"Parnell is half mad. We always act without him. He accepts this position ; if he did not we should overlook him. Do not trouble yourself about him." Labouchere was so impressed that he assured Chamberlain a few days later that "Parnell is not much more than a figure-head." Even a month after, though Labouchere included Parnell in a list of four directors of the Irish Party, he added to Chamberlain, "Parnell I put last, because he will agree to the decisions of the other three." Healy by this time, however, was undeceived as to his leader's power. "What I say is," he wrote to Labouchere on January 15th, 1886, only six days later than the latter's letter to Chamberlain, "What I say is, let Mr. Gladstone satisfy Parnell and the whole thing is settled."

If these varied charges and allegations against Parnell—to anticipate a phrase which later became historic—had been the considered opinions of cautious observers, unaffected by personal considerations, they would be immediately acceptable as evidence ; but they were all expressed at a moment when their utterers, each in his own degree, was a temporarily defeated and disgruntled man. But Parnell did not stand alone as their target for personal attacks. In the letter to

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Labouchere of October, 1885, in which Chamberlain described Parnell as undependable, he indicated "suspicions as to the intentions of our great chief"; and this sneer at Gladstone was hardened a few months afterwards by a warning to the same politician that he was "being bamboozled by the old Parliamentary hand," the phrase descriptive of himself invented by the Liberal leader only a short while before. According to Labouchere, in December, 1885, "the ways of Mr. Gladstone are rather more mysterious than those of the Heathen Chinese," and he was "engaged in a game of dodging"; while, three months later, he wrote to Chamberlain, "I rather suspect that the revered G.O.M. ['Grand Old Man,' Gladstone's popular nickname] is playing a game."

But it was the maddest of all mad political worlds just then, and those taking very leading parts in it lost for a time their tact, their temper, and even their taste. "Hartington is cuts with Churchill," gleefully exclaims Labouchere to Chamberlain; "Lord Carnarvon has played the devil," Churchill angrily tells Salisbury. While Labouchere is declaring that "Goschen is playing a double game," Healy is assuring him that a great deal of what Churchill had told him was "bluff," adding, a week later, "I think Randolph must have pulled the long-bow rather taut to you in every way. I don't believe anything he has been saying." Labouchere, meantime, was finding Harcourt "vague and misty," and even "a timorous Sambo"; and Lord Richard Grosvenor (afterwards

Lord Stalbridge), the chief Liberal Whip, was "not to be trusted." While Churchill found time at the India Office on a Christmas Day to exclaim to Labouchere concerning Gladstone, "He be damned," Healy was occupying his "Christmas, '85," in telling that "Randolph's talk was mere funkee-funkee"; and the very day afterwards Chamberlain was pouring into the same capacious ear his "sickness of the vague generalities of John Morley."

The fact is that the minds of many of our foremost men just then were for the time more than a little unbalanced. All those whose denunciatory opinions of Parnell have been quoted had their own grievances against him, and attributed their temporary eclipse to his tactics. Chamberlain and Churchill continued to nurse their grievances: Labouchere and Healy were the first to perceive that there was more in Parnell's tactics than at first they had believed. Parnell immediately after the 1885 election had been thought by Labouchere to be vague, but he was very soon telling Chamberlain, "Parnell will not be such a fool as to show his hand for the benefit of Mr. Gladstone." And even Healy, who had complained in the October that "Parnell hardly spoke to his followers upon political matters, beyond such as concerned the Irish elections," averred two months later that "The fact that Parnell's reserve is so provoking to the English is the best justification in our minds." Recalling, therefore, all my memories of Parnell at both the height of his power and the depth of his

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collapse, and noting that I did not lie under the suspicion by him of being an English politician seeking to profit at the expense of an Irish chief, I can only repeat my testimony to his unvarying straightforwardness to myself, even in times of great difficulty, when a diplomatic deception might have served him well.

### III

#### “ PARNELLISM AND CRIME ”

**E**IGHTEEN hundred and eighty-seven is always to be specially noted in our political history, because it saw the opening of a dramatic series of events, which, as they developed, first shook and finally shattered the power of Parnell. The tale has often been told in fragments, from partisan and personal points of view, and often at second-hand. But it should be told as a whole, with both knowledge and impartiality, for there are inside points strikingly illuminating it which have not yet been revealed. Four—perhaps five—Irishmen living at the moment of writing could, if they would, tell very much still hidden ; but, for cogent reasons, they are not likely at any time to tell all. I would claim to be the only Englishman who can fill in a number of gaps. I was in intimate and frequent confidence with Parnell during the last four years of his life, and I had known much concerning him for some time previously. More than that : during those four years—from the beginning of 1888 to the end of 1891—I enjoyed the confidence of not only Parnell but Joseph Chamberlain, John Morley, Charles Russell, and other leading

actors in an absorbing drama, as well as of certain very active wire-pullers in every political camp, who eagerly at that period pulled strings which did more than move puppets—they strangled politicians.

The beginning, as far as the world was concerned, of the “Parnellism and Crime” movement was in the spring of 1887, when on Monday, April 18th, the morning of the day the Commons were to divide on the second reading of the hotly contested Irish Crimes Bill—or Coercion Bill, as its Nationalist and Liberal opponents always termed it—the *Times* published in facsimile a letter purporting to have been written by Parnell, seeking to excuse, under the plea of necessity, his public condemnation of the Phoenix Park murders. The shock was completely unexpected. That same morning, I had published in the *Birmingham Daily Post* a “Private Letter” I then weekly contributed, a statement concerning some of the extremely angry scenes on both sides that had marked the Crimes Bill debate, which ended thus: “Even the *Times* evidently feels that the attempt to make believe that Mr. Parnell, Mr. Justin McCarthy, Mr. Sexton, and Mr. Healy were knowingly the associates of murderers has failed. No one seriously credits the statement; and it is only another of the unpleasant features of the present heated situation that an accusation of such gravity should be lightly used as a political weapon, without the slightest attempt to prove it with such evidence as any court of justice would accept.” This was published at the hour the *Times* launched its



thunderbolt ; and the *Birmingham Daily Post*, though a strong opponent of Home Rule, promptly took the line of justice and fairplay it pursued throughout. “ The very importance of the issue,” it the next morning exclaimed, “ calls for the exercise of patience and forbearance, pending that full enquiry which is due to the country no less than to the parties immediately concerned. If this charge be not true—and it seems to be absolutely incredible—Mr. Parnell has suffered an injury which demands an immediate and a signal retribution. Denial being offered, it is to the accuser that we must look for proof.” That proof was never produced.

Mrs. O’Shea—a name always to be fatally linked with Parnell’s—with whom at that moment, as so often before, he was staying at Eltham, told with circumstance nearly thirty years later how the Irish leader first learned the news, and described the unconcern with which he treated it. She related in minute detail how at breakfast she “ propped the *Times* against the teapot as usual. He read the whole thing ; meditatively buttering and eating his toast the while. I supplied him with marmalade, and turned over the folded paper for him so that he could read more easily. He made no remark at all till he had finished breakfast, and carefully clipped the end off his cigar ; then, with a smile, he tossed the paper at me, saying, ‘ Now for that assaying I didn’t finish ! Wouldn’t you hide your head with shame if your King were so stupid as that, my Queen ? ’ . . . He worked at his

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crucibles, and jotted down results—absolutely absorbed for more than two hours, and only brought back to politics by my call of, ‘You absolutely must start now.’”

This is a strikingly dramatic story of a strange domestic scene, and it has generally been accepted as accurate. It happens, however, totally to differ from that which Parnell himself told the very same night in the House of Commons. The easy answer has been made that this difference proves the politician to have been a liar ; but those who commit themselves to belief in one part of Mrs. O’Shea’s narrative of that momentous day’s proceedings must accept the whole. Such a course is rendered impossible by her equally circumstantial tale of how the same evening Parnell returned to Eltham while she was out, and quietly went on with his gold-assaying—a chemical process of which, for material as well as scientific reasons, he was fond—only wearily telling her, when pressed after her return, that his party wanted him to fight the matter, but it would be a terrible nuisance, and that the opinion of the *Times* and its readers did not interest him. All this part of the narrative is contrary to fact. Parnell heatedly participated in the debate about midnight, after discussing the matter with colleagues, allies, and acquaintances throughout the evening ; and his precise statement of how he earliest learned of the facsimile letter, publicly made the same night, must be accepted. “Sir,” he exclaimed to the Speaker (Peel), “when I first heard

of this precious concoction—I heard of it before I saw it, because I do not take in or even read the *Times* usually—when I heard that a letter of this description, bearing my signature, had been published in the *Times* . . . when I saw what purported to be my signature, I saw plainly that it was an audacious and unblushing fabrication. . . . I certainly never heard of the letter. I never directed such a letter to be written. I never saw such a letter before I saw it in the *Times*.”

That precise and absolute statement bore out in every way what already had become known at Westminster in the course of the sitting. Timothy Harrington, an Irish barrister, and one of Parnell’s keenest adherents who remained faithful to the end, met him in the afternoon as he strolled leisurely into the House. “Have you seen the *Times*?” asked Harrington. “No,” said “the Chief” (according to his biographer, Barry O’Brien), who rarely read any newspaper unless his attention was specially called to it. Then Mr. Harrington told him the news. ‘Ah!’ said Parnell, ‘let me see it,’ and they went to the Library. ‘Parnell,’ says Mr. Harrington, ‘put the paper before him on the table, and read the letter carefully. I thought he would burst into some indignant exclamation, say, “What damned scoundrels! What a vile forgery!” but not a bit of it. He put his finger on the S of the signature, and said quite calmly, as if it were a matter of the utmost indifference: “I did not make an S like that since 1878.” “My God!” I thought, “if this is the way he is going to

deal with the letter in the House, there is not an Englishman who will not believe that he wrote it.' ”

Immediate confirmation came promptly to myself of the contemptuous coolness with which Parnell at first treated the charge, though he denied it from the outset. It was before my entry to the Lobby, but I learned that same evening from Pitt of the Press Association that Parnell, whom he knew well, had emphatically assured him that the letter was forged. Not only this, but he wrote, at Pitt's request, two copies of his usual signature, so that they might immediately be reproduced to prove the forgery. Parnell had scarcely done so when he changed his mind, and forbade publication, on the ground that, whatever he did, those who would believe him guilty of writing such an infamous letter would believe him guilty still. Pitt was permitted, however, to show the signatures, on promise of immediate return, to a few friends, of whom I was one. I had had some amateur training in the analysis of handwriting, first stimulated by a book of facsimiles published during the Tichborne Trial, when I was sixteen, and later fostered by some strange happenings with anonymous letters in a town where I was journalistically engaged. I at once labelled the facsimile signature a forgery ; but all to whom I gave the opinion that night countered with the question, “ Then, why didn't Parnell get up at once in the House and say so ? ”

Responsibility for that irreparable delay of seven or eight hours was always laid by Parnell on the rigid

rules of the House, as well as on the resolve of his political foes to keep him from speaking until the very latest hour, debate at that time not automatically closing at eleven o'clock as now, but going on indeterminately. Cool though he had seemed when the facsimile was brought first to his notice, Parnell felt as the hours went on that he was bound to take a strong line. But it was not until nearly one in the morning that he had his chance, and then he took it with the comprehensive denial already given. That was eighteen hours after the accusation had left Printing House Square, in the course of which the *Times'* statement had gone uncontradicted throughout the world. It was not until between two and three in the morning that the newspapers outside London received the denial. To a number of these it came too late for publication in the early editions. All of them had their leading articles ready to print, the Conservatives and Liberal Unionists delighted and the Liberals not unnaturally dubious. The whole affair was as miserably mismanged on the Nationalist side as it was relentlessly pressed on the Conservative ; and its ill-effects on the Home Rule campaign were long and severely felt.

Yet the blow missed, after the first shivering shock, the full force intended ; and I was in a position periodically to indicate with clearness how this came about. Though the proof the *Birmingham Daily Post*, almost, if not quite, alone among anti-Home Rule journals, at once asked for was not offered, the accusa-

tion stood ; and, at the end of that eventful week, I thus recorded my estimate of the situation : “ The dispute which raged so violently at the beginning of the week as to the authenticity of the letter on the Phœnix Park murders, attributed by the *Times* to Mr. Parnell, begins to hang fire. On Monday, the day of its publication and before it could be closely scrutinized, the opinion was very general that the letter might be genuine : to-day [Saturday] after ample opportunity has been given for considering it, the opinion is almost equally general that it is a fabrication. No one dreams that the Editor of the *Times* was mad enough or wicked enough to publish a forged document, knowing it to have been forged ; but the appetite for hoaxes which this gentleman has displayed has been so marked that it is believed that some clever person, knowing how eager the *Times* has been to black the character of Mr. Parnell, sold to Printing House Square a document which the Irish leader never saw or dreamt of. Those who know Mr. Parnell best—not only members of his own party, but other politicians who have been brought into close contact with him—are unanimous in considering that the evidence to be derived from the letter itself, altogether apart from the signature, is conclusive against the idea that he dictated it. As for the evidence of handwriting, the body of the epistle is not in a hand at all resembling that of his private secretary at the date named ; while the signature, though like that of Mr. Parnell’s earlier years, is dissimilar from that used by him in and

about May, 1882. What steps Mr. Parnell may take it is for him to decide ; but, if the *Times* would indicate how it obtained the letter, and what proof it has that it is genuine, the swiftly growing opinion that it has been hoaxed might even now be checked.”

During the next fortnight matters drifted on. Parnell’s adherents—and even Liberals who at first doubted soon swung into line—demanded the appointment of a Select Committee of the House of Commons ; but this was refused by the Government, on the advice of Randolph Churchill, who was hoping for speedy re-admission to the Cabinet fold. Ministers told Parnell that his remedy was an action for libel, brought either in London or Dublin ; but his friends, as Morley has shown, held that the moral effect on English opinion of an Irish verdict would be exactly as worthless as the effect of an English verdict in a political or international case would be upon the judgment and feeling of Ireland. And Morley adds that Parnell acted on the advice he received from the three persons in the House—one of whom is known to have been himself—with whom on this point he took counsel. But the strain of the struggle told heavily on Parnell. Lord Salisbury, in the high position of Prime Minister, publicly described as one “ tainted with the strong presumption of conniving at assassination ” a politician with whom only fifteen months before he had shown himself willing to negotiate ; and those anti-Home Rulers who, in Gladstonian phrase, were in a position of greater freedom and less respon-

sibility, were unrestrained in their denunciation. It was no wonder that a man, already weakened by previous illnesses, was so obviously shaken by all this that, when he was known to have gone in the midst of it to his Irish home at Avondale, many believed him ready to throw up the sponge.

But this was not Parnell's way. The suggestion of a Select Committee had been refused by the Government on May 5th ; and four days later I wrote, "Rumours are being renewed, and renewed only to be contradicted, that Mr. Parnell, broken down in health and spirit, intends to resign the leadership of the Irish party, and, in fact, to abandon political life. Sober-minded persons will not believe this until they have it under Mr. Parnell's own hand. He is the most mysterious man in politics, as all the world by this time should know ; and the fact that he should be staying at Avondale at such a crisis as the present, though it may to a large extent be accounted for by the state of his health, is only another proof of the fact. No one can have seen him in his place in the House this session without having perceived that the illness of last year has left a lasting mark upon his face. From what one knows of him, it is impossible to believe that he would choose the hour when a Coercion Bill was being rushed through Parliament to withdraw from the leadership. If he studied the theatrical side of public life, he would come to the House, as did the elder Pitt, swathed in bandages, and with his physician within easy reach. But Mr. Parnell cares for none of



these things. The voice of those around him, even of those most closely connected with him, has never troubled him much ; and, though he was stung by the *Times* three weeks ago into an indignant denial of the authenticity of the facsimile letter, and has since offered to submit the whole case to a Committee of the House, he is likely, now the Tories have refused to avail themselves of the offer, to go on in his old fashion, and, when strengthened by the air of Avondale, to return to his place in good fighting trim, determined to treat the *Times*' accusations with the contempt he believes they deserve.” Though Mrs. O'Shea, in the course of an apparently detailed narrative, touches all this critical period very thinly, Parnell's physical condition remained threatening. He returned from Ireland to the House, where he made some fitful appearances, the *Times*' genially suggesting that he was shamming, while another Conservative journal put down his illness to the workings of an uneasy conscience. “ But,” I wrote on May 21st, “ those who have seen him within the past few days have been astonished at the alarming change in his appearance a few weeks have made. At the beginning of the session he looked weary and indisposed ; but now illness has marked him for its own, and a long and complete rest is obviously necessary if he is again to take a prominent part in public affairs.” But, by the time this was written, and for weeks afterwards, the public mind, not only in London, but throughout the Empire, was filled with the first Jubilee of Queen

Victoria. Nothing else was talked of anywhere ; and the personal attack on Parnell was relegated to the political dust-heap, stirred up at intervals by zealous partisans, but to little effect. British and Irish supporters of Home Rule alike fully accepted the Irish leader's original description in the House of Commons of the facsimile letter as a villainous and barefaced forgery ; his deliberate declaration that he had never heard of it, never directed it to be written, and never seen it before its appearance in the *Times* ; and his passionate assertion that, if he had been in Phœnix Park on the fatal afternoon, he would have stood between the murdered men and the daggers of their assassins. Yet, specific as were his denials, party passion ran so high that all this continued for the time to be as frankly disbelieved by his opponents as it was eagerly accepted by his friends ; and, when the session of 1887 came to an end, the tangled skein thus provided seemed destined never to be unwound.

## IV

### PIGOTT AND THE *TIMES*

LIKE so many similar unravellings in history, the mystery surrounding the authorship of the facsimile letter was dispelled, as had been that of the Phoenix Park murders themselves a few years before, almost by accident. The matter had largely died out of the public mind when, the *Times* continuing to publish additions to its "Parnellism and Crime" series of articles, Frank Hugh O'Donnell, an eccentric, hot-headed, irresponsible ex-Nationalist member, dragged it once more into blazing light. This singular personage had first come into Parliamentary notoriety as an associate of Parnell in the obstruction policy. So much, indeed, were they allied in the public mind that in September, 1878, when Isaac Butt, then titular chief of the Irish party, wrote a letter strongly denouncing this policy, I, in a leading article in the *Bradford Observer* (now the *Yorkshire Observer*) bracketed "the furious quartette—Messrs. Biggar, Parnell, O'Donnell, and O'Connor Power"—as those principally concerned in a plan to discredit the House of Commons, the power and reputation of which throughout my political life I have held dear. It was

my first mention of Parnell in print ; and, though strongly opposing his course, I foresaw its immediate success. While all England was acclaiming Butt, Ireland was silently condemning him. " It is to be hoped—we can scarcely say it is to be expected—that Mr. Butt will be supported by the majority of Home Rulers," I wrote ; and it was emphasized that his letter might lose him the Home Rule leadership. Death not long afterwards intervened to do this ; but I can claim to have perceived the moment at which the Irish tide turned definitely in favour of Parnell.

But O'Donnell, though thus early associated with, was never to the taste of Parnell, who so deeply distrusted and disliked him that he would not include him among the Nationalist candidates to be returned at the determining general election of 1885. O'Donnell, as a consequence, was fully ready to take any course that might prove hurtful to his old chief ; and, aided by the counsels of Philip Callan, another ex-Nationalist member whom Parnell detested and had dismissed from the party fold, he professed in November, 1887, to perceive a reflection on himself in a *Times*' allusion to the letter of its own production ; and he issued a writ for libel, claiming damages to the amount of fifty thousand pounds. The matter would have been a farce if the *Times* had not leaped with alacrity at the chance thus given to bring out its whole case in an English court of law, in circumstances most favourable to itself. It engaged as leading counsel the Attorney-General, Sir Richard Webster, who, with singular

fatuity, Ministers had offered to Parnell in that capacity, when they had vainly suggested legal action to him a few months before ; and Webster made the most of his opportunity. When the case came forward in the summer of 1888, O'Donnell declined to go into the witness-box, and the record might, therefore, have been at once withdrawn ; but this would have suited neither the *Times* nor the purpose at which O'Donnell and his advisers may be thought to have aimed. As it was, the Attorney-General opened his case in full, and read in Court not only the facsimile letter but others which, if genuine, deeply damned Parnell both as a politician and a man. " The letters," as they were always thereafter known, were produced in such a way as to give the one most incriminated by them no opportunity for immediate repudiation, explanation, or reply. But Parnell at once told me in the Lobby that he was prepared to testify on oath that he had neither dictated nor signed them, and that he had no knowledge of their contents until they were published in or produced by the *Times*. This the next day he repeated in the House ; and, after the Government had refused his request for a Special Committee to inquire into the allegations, he left it to Ministers to take further steps. And the believers in his guilt at once pressed the Government to abandon its attitude of *non possumus*, and institute an inquiry, they thought would reveal such Nationalist turpitude as to ruin beyond redemption the Home Rule cause.

Ministers, though with considerable hesitation and

reluctance, yielded to the 'clamour ; but, continuing to refuse a Special Committee, and recognizing that another libel action, tried before either a Middlesex or a Dublin jury, would satisfy not a single soul, they proposed to set up a Special Commission of three judges to investigate not "the letters" specifically, as was generally wished, but the whole history of the defunct Irish Land League, of which Parnell had been the inspiring spirit. The Home Rule leader immediately told me that, while he and his colleagues in the Land League movement had nothing to fear from such an investigation, he objected to a "fishing inquiry" that would last for months or years. The first thing, in his opinion, was to test the genuineness of "the letters," a process he did not believe would take a week, would clear the ground, and would dispose of what everybody thought the most serious of the charges ; and to this opinion that "the letters" should be taken first and disposed of immediately he adhered throughout. But the Government would not give way ; and a Bill of far-sweeping range of inquiry was introduced.

The measure was noted to be "backed" by W. H. Smith, as leader of the House and Henry Matthews as Home Secretary, but by only one law officer, and he the English Solicitor-General, Sir Edward Clarke. The absence of the Attorney-General's name was obviously accounted for by his having acted as counsel for the *Times* in the libel action which had precipitated the Parliamentary demand for inquiry ; but the omis-

sion of the one Irish law officer then in the House puzzled the closely observant. It was a full twenty years before I learned the reason, and then from Dodgson Madden himself, at this particular moment Solicitor-General for Ireland, and afterwards an Irish judge. Dining in company with him at Provost's House, Trinity College, Dublin, as guests of the then Provost, Anthony Traill, I was told by Madden in 1908 that the Irish law officers were at no point consulted, though the Bill concerned a purely Irish issue, and only Irishmen were involved in the investigation; and they were not showing on what evidence its promoters relied. "If we had been aware," said Madden, "that the *Times* had received the letters from Richard Pigott, we, who had known that fellow through and through for many years, would have strongly advised against bringing in the Bill at all, for Pigott's very name was enough to ruin anything." And that this was the general Irish estimate of that pitiable personage can be gathered from the opinion of a barrister in the opposite camp, T. M. Healy having told Labouchere as early as January, 1886: "This fellow who writes as 'An Old Fenian' in the *St. James's Gazette*, extracts from which I have seen, is Dick Pigott, late of the *Irishman* newspaper, who swindled every Fenian Fund he could milk, and whom the boys would not touch with the tongs." It was on this extremely rotten prop that was leaned the only part of the *Times'* charges about which the British people as a whole cared a jot. But it was only later

that it became known that neither Ministers nor their law officers, English or Irish, knew—or apparently had troubled to inquire—what evidence could be produced. They accepted the assurance of the *Times* that proof could be given, and this sufficed. Joseph Soames, the *Times*' trusted solicitor—"that very dull but respectable solicitor," as Edward Clarke afterwards described him—acknowledged to the Special Commission, under examination by Webster, that he had not mentioned Pigott's name to counsel before that body began to sit. Little wonder is it that the Attorney-General felt his anger deepen at having thus been led into a blind alley that could not be escaped from without discredit. He had, indeed, been out of temper with the affair all through, though none beyond his immediate colleagues suspected it. Edward Clarke placed it on record in "The Story of My Life," thirty years after these events, "Webster was not in favour of a Special Commission, and I was thoroughly against it. He wrote to me from Scotland on September 3rd [1888]: 'I have written to Smith to say that in my opinion I ought not to appear before the Commission now that it has taken its present shape. Every day I curse Chamberlain and the [Liberal] Unionists for their obstinacy, but perhaps they are wiser than I am.'"

But, from a very striking Conservative source, counsel of caution at once was publicly and vehemently urged. Randolph Churchill had been becoming increasingly restive as the session of 1888 advanced.



At its beginning, he and his family and friends had openly shown their belief that speedily he would be recalled to office; but Salisbury had hardened his heart against the young *ex-lieutenant* whom he thought had served him so ill. In the May, I had had occasion to write in the *Birmingham Post*: "Lord Randolph Churchill, like the busy and occasionally venomous bee, can never be depended on. The fact is that he desires for various reasons to return to office; and, as he finds that benevolent neutrality will not secure such a consummation, he is determined to try what a little caustic criticism can do." His chance came in the July over the Special Commission Bill, but it availed him nothing. Up to the previous year, he had been accustomed to be consulted on various Government proposals by W. H. Smith, who had succeeded him in the leadership of the House, but, on this occasion, he was passed over. As a consequence, he wrote a long memorandum for the Cabinet, setting out in great detail practical, political, and constitutional objections to the creation of a Special Commission, but it passed without heed.

Churchill's opposition came to nothing, for Chamberlain and the Radical Unionists, as Webster bitterly noted to Clarke, were as keen supporters of the measure as Hartington and the Whig Unionists; and the blood of the Conservatives was thoroughly up. Many "scenes" and "incidents" and distractions marked the extremely troubled passage of the Bill through the Commons; and they began

promptly after its earliest mention. At the outset Parnell was of the mind to ask for no more than that the names of the Commissioners should be laid on the table, with a pledge that "the letters" should first be investigated; and he intimated that, these points granted, he would not care how wide the reference was made. But he soon departed from this aloof position; and a very few nights after the measure had been announced, but before its actual bringing in, he had a very angry encounter over it in the Commons, with both the Speaker and the leader of the House. The *Times* next day spoke of his "simulated indignation," but the adjective was strangely misapplied. When I met him immediately after the incident, he was in a state of almost uncontrollable excitement. "I shall make a strong statement when the Bill is introduced," he exclaimed. "The fact is that Ministers are shrinking from the inquiry, but I will force them to go on with it. This is not a matter between them and myself; if I am the criminal they say I am, it is a question for the House and the House alone. To ask me to say at once, and without the least opportunity for discussion, whether I will take the inquiry they offer is monstrous. They have gone to the *Times* and consulted them as to the terms of the reference, while I, who am put forward as the other party to the transaction, have been told nothing whatever about them." His statement respecting consultation with the *Times* was accurate, and the belief that he was harshly used in this regard remained

with him ; but Gladstone privately intimated that, if the Government insisted on forcing through every line of the Bill, he would encourage no active opposition, as he was determined that the inquiry should not be allowed to fail. And, on the night the second reading was moved, Parnell told me that he did not intend to divide at that stage : “ I shall do nothing to give them an excuse for withdrawing it. I am very anxious for an inquiry, which would suit me better than a libel action.”

After, in fact, the first burst of fiery denial and denunciation, Parnell again became the detached, imperturbable onlooker he always seemed, even when there were in question personal as well as political matters deeply concerning himself. At the very beginning of the heated discussion over the Bill, the Lobby one evening was convulsed with a rumour from Dublin that he was dead. Though I had talked with him only late the previous night, when, while not looking robust, he had been in good spirits, there was nothing on the face of it unbelievable in the report of his sudden death, as a doctor whom he had consulted had told me not long before that he might break a blood vessel at any moment. But, after an hour and a half of excited gossip, Parnell walked into the Lobby, looking far from a dead or even a dying man. When I told him the rumour, he smilingly asked, “ What did I die of ? ” adding that this kind of report had previously been circulated in the same fashion when his name was specially prominent before

the public, but that, saving a cold in the head, taken in a Law Courts draught while attending the O'Donnell and *Times* trial, he had felt so well as to ride in the Park that morning. The previous occasion to which he referred was four or five years before. When waiting with Mrs. O'Shea at Brighton Station to take a train to London, they noted a crowding round the bookstall placards and much excitement among buyers of newspapers. Mrs. O'Shea later told how "Parnell did not wish to be recognized, as he was supposed at the time to be in Ireland ; but, hearing Gladstone's name mentioned by a passer-by, our curiosity got the better of our caution, and we went to get a paper. Parnell, being so tall a man, could see over the heads of the crowd, and, reading the placard, turned back without getting a paper to tell me that the excitement was over the report of 'the assassination of Mr. Parnell.' I then asked him to get into the train so that we should run no risk of his being known, and managed to get through the crowd to buy a paper myself. How the report arose we never knew, but at that time, when every post brought Parnell some threat of violence and my nerves were jarred and tense with daily fear for him, it took all my fortitude to answer his smile and joke at the unfounded report which left me sick and shaken."

The more bitter of his foes, filled in this session of 1888 with the belief that Parnell was a modern mixture of Machiavelli and Mephistopheles, would have readily supplied an unfavourable interpretation of any rumours

about him, for the depth of their hatred knew no bound. This may be gauged from a statement seriously made to me one night of the Special Commission debates by a Unionist authority, that he had been told by "a Home Rule proprietor of the *Times*," whose existence I had not suspected, that, if Parnell were not a coward, he would cut his throat before the Commission began to sit. That kind of fantastic political virulence seems well-nigh inconceivable now. It is supremely difficult to bring home to a generation accustomed to the existence of an Irish Free State, with Dublin as its capital and T. M. Healy its Governor-General, the panic terror into which a large portion of the British electorate had been thrown by Gladstone's Home Rule proposals. The horror aroused by the wanton and purposeless murders in Phoenix Park had been darkened and deepened by the dynamite outrages in our own capital. Not only public buildings, such as the House of Commons, Westminster Hall, and the Tower—and all the same Saturday afternoon—with the Local Government Board and London Bridge, had been attempted to be blown up, but places crowded with quiet-going, everyday folk, like the Underground Railway and Ludgate Hill Station, while gasworks at various crowded centres were threatened. To yield anything to Irish claims for self-government in the midst of terrorism so basely brutal seemed not simply to condone crime, but to glorify it ; and Gladstone's apparent surrender to violence drove into vehement opposition

many of his oldest political friends, and some to the greatest lengths. One such was a Whig peer, who owed to that Prime Minister's efforts the only dukedom of the United Kingdom created for more than forty years. In the exuberance of his gratitude, he commissioned his political patron's portrait to be painted by the most fashionable artist of the day ; but, in the violence of his antagonism, he openly turned that portrait to the wall—and privately sold it at a profit. But there were antagonists who were vile as well as violent ; and London of the later 'eighties seethed with filthy slanders on a statesman who, a decade later, was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, after lying in state for two days in Westminster Hall, publicly mourned by the Heir-apparent to the Throne, the Conservative Prime Minister with his Cabinet, and both Houses of Parliament, and privately lamented by millions of his countrymen throughout the world.

To make this portion of the narrative complete, it only remains to be noted that the Government, being convinced that Parnell would be convicted on the charges and allegations levelled by the *Times* against him, determined to carry the Special Commission Bill through Parliament at any cost. Exceptional machinery of newly devised procedure was employed to ensure this being done ; and, after closures oft and frantic "scenes" beyond computation, a Special Commission was set up, consisting of Sir James Hannen, President of the Probate, Divorce, and Admiralty Division, Mr. Justice Day, and Mr. Justice

A. L. Smith, to investigate the *Times*' charges and allegations against the Nationalist members as participants in the Land League agitation, no special attention being drawn to "the letters," without the original publication of which not a soul other than the most bitter partisan would have dreamed the accusations worth specially inquiring into. Randolph Churchill protested on constitutional grounds in the Commons ; Herschell, so recently Lord Chancellor, did the like in the Lords, imploring the Peers to consider how dangerous was the precedent of confusing judges with politicians, framers of legislation with administrators of the law ; but all opposing efforts were vain. It might have been different if Ministers or their supporters in both Houses had dreamed that the main part of their case rested on Pigott, who afterwards added perjury to forgery, and ultimately paid forfeit by suicide in an obscure hotel in Madrid.

## V

### THE SPECIAL COMMISSION

**A**LL the pestilent political passions of the period were seething when, in the midst of eager partisan expectation, the Special Commission held in the middle of September, 1888, its preliminary sitting. But, though politicians shortened their recess in order to attend, the general public were unmoved. "No one would have imagined on passing the Law Courts this morning," I that day wrote, "that the most striking political trial of modern times was about to commence"; and the opening day's dullness was the prelude of many such. "This inquiry need not be disposed of with great rapidity," incidentally observed at the start Sir James Hannen, the almost preternaturally grave President; and I promptly prophesied a prolonged investigation. The prophecy proved correct, for on the real opening day, five weeks later, the Attorney-General (always careful to indicate that he appeared in a private capacity, but always insisting on his official precedence) began to outline at wearisome length—a "somewhat monotonous and laborious task," he himself termed it—the case against the Land League presented by the Irish constabulary



through the *Times*. There had been no great listening assembly at the beginning, and even this steadily dwindled. Hannen, when asked to order further accommodation, replied, "I hold that the public is best represented by the Press"; and the reports were becoming shortened when interest was strikingly aroused by the unexpected and, in effect, unexplained appearance in the box of the mystery man of the whole transaction, Captain O'Shea. Why he had come forward was not obvious—except it was to do a good service to Chamberlain and an ill-turn to Parnell, which seemed the only points clearly to emerge from what he testified. Why, if he came, he was in such a hurry to go, was even less plain. Why he was treated so tenderly by Webster and Russell alike, the opposing chief counsel in the case—the only witness to be thus lightly touched by both throughout the investigation—was evident only to those with knowledge of the man and his methods, who studied him closely during the relatively brief time he was in court. Why he was so deadly an enemy of the leading figure among the accused is later to be shown.

After Webster's dreary opening speech had been followed by days of dull police evidence on Land League speeches, O'Shea was suddenly brought into the box. His appearance was evidently expected, as Parnell for the first time was punctual in attendance at the opening of the Court "Parnell very early. Why?" I at once noted on my pad; and the reason was speedily clear. O'Shea was known to the

general public as a versatile Irish politician who had been rather Liberal than Nationalist, whose Parliamentary promise had resulted in no practical performance, and whose wife's name for half a dozen years had been coupled in scandalous rumour with Parnell. It was remembered that the tongue of ill-report had been heard as early as the Irish leader's release from Kilmainham in the spring of 1882. Four years later it became more clear and even clangorous when, against the strenuous counsel of his whole party, voiced with almost brutal emphasis by the outspoken and usually trusted Biggar, Parnell insisted on O'Shea's return at a by-election for Galway. And he was rewarded by his protégé two months afterwards voting against him in the critical division of June 8th, 1886, which wrecked Home Rule for the rest of Parnell's life. These remembrances stimulated curiosity as to what would be said by the man who for years had been the special intermediary concerning Irish affairs between Gladstone, as well as Chamberlain, and Parnell.

O'Shea had long been known to me by appearance, but he had disappeared from Westminster before my regular entrance to the Lobby. I remembered him as a spruce, dandified man, filled with belief in himself and disbelief in others. He was the kind of gentlemanlike adventurer, cynically contemptuous under the guise of *bonhomie*, never unknown in either social, financial, or public life, who makes the world his oyster, and is disappointed at the size of the pearls.

But the O'Shea who was called by Webster into the witness-box that morning was not the man my memory recalled. He had very much changed, in both figure and face, in the direction of what was then known as "the shabby genteel"; and, as the examination opened, he was nervous and trembling, his shifty replies causing Hannen to whisper to Day behind his hand an obviously unfavourable comment. Called hurriedly, the witness wanted to leave with similar speed, because he "required to go to Spain on business"—as did Pigott a few months later when his forgeries were exposed. Having been subpœnaed by both sides, he was walked round very delicately by each. Russell showed himself as reluctant as Webster to tempt him to speak freely, for neither trusted him, and each suspected he might say too much. When he showed a tendency to wander from the point, Webster more than once enjoined him, "Now, just answer my question 'Yes' or 'No,' if you please." O'Shea declared that, at Parnell's request, he entered into negotiations—a word Russell promptly caused to be changed to communications—with Gladstone in June, 1881, and with Chamberlain over the "Kilmainham Treaty" of the following spring. According to him, Parnell objected to the release from prison of some of his colleagues at the same time as himself, and particularly Davitt, who at the moment was sitting with grim set face next Parnell, Healy, and Biggar, listening intently. With some minuteness he told the Kilmainham story—of Parnell's promise

to do his utmost to put down outrages and boycotting, which he felt "it was only due to Mr. Parnell to state"; of Chamberlain making a memorandum on his own note-paper of the Parnell-O'Shea conversation; of Parnell warning by letter "My dear O'Shea" against showing over-anxiety to secure release, and hinting it would be better not to see him in prison again; and of his having been entrusted by Parnell with a letter to Forster, at the moment Chief Secretary for Ireland, which he took to that politician's house, "and it was given to the Cabinet." Russell immediately protested: "How could the witness know this?" and Hannen said curtly to O'Shea, "Better leave out the word 'Cabinet,' " for it was the second time he had brought it in.

All through this, O'Shea was manifestly trying to repress his excitement, but his hands trembled a great deal, while Parnell looked eagerly yet gravely towards him the whole time. Parnell's gravity increased as the witness proceeded to tell of what passed on the thrilling Sunday which followed the Phoenix Park murders. Parnell, he said, called on him in the morning, and asked him to go and see Hamilton, Gladstone's private secretary. He later told Parnell that Davitt had drawn up a manifesto denouncing the crime, which he showed him in the afternoon at Chamberlain's house; but Parnell, while willing to sign a condemnatory document, demurred to one so bombastic. "It was, in fact, to the English of it he objected," queried Webster; and the rejoinder was

"Yes." On their way back in a cab from Chamberlain's house, Parnell spoke of the personal danger in which he stood, and asked him to get police protection, with the result that O'Shea went at once to Sir William Harcourt, then Home Secretary, and made this request, which was granted. It was only a step from this to the facsimile letter, and O'Shea was asked whether he believed it to be genuine. He at once began to fence: "I am not an expert," he explained, a reply which made Webster grow testy, and then, the question being repeated, the witness said, "I believe so, but I'm not sure." He would not be positive over any of the incriminating letters submitted by the *Times*. At the first he had thought they were not Parnell's, then had changed his mind, and now would not go beyond, "If these letters came to me, I should say they were written by Mr. Parnell. I could not say further." And, strikingly enough, neither of the leading counsel showed a wish to press him for a more positive reply.

Russell, after some demur because the calling of O'Shea had come as a surprise, somewhat lightly cross-examined. But a point soon arose which later was seen to be of special and sinister significance—the introduction into the proceedings for the first time of the name which in the end dominated them all. While the Commission had still been the main topic for lobby talk, I had written three months earlier, "Mr. Richard Pigott, once editor of the *Irishman*, is spoken of as a probable witness"; and now O'Shea

was suddenly asked, "Do you know the name of Pigott, former editor of the *Irishman*?" "Yes." "Have you heard his name in connection with these letters?" "Yes—yes, but not that they were obtained from him." Hannen evidently knew better than ordinary listeners what lay behind; and, as O'Shea tried hard to repress the excitement his shaking hands betrayed, the old judge, with eyes shaded by palm, narrowly watched him, and once whispered to Day a further comment behind his hand. Pressed to give any other names he had heard associated with supplying the letters to the *Times*, he answered "Philip Callan," and then hurriedly, "to whom I haven't spoken for four years." Callan, a former Nationalist member, who had been banned from Westminster by Parnell simultaneously with O'Donnell, was at this moment right behind O'Shea; and he and I exchanged glances, for not long before we had had a personal encounter on this very point. Between the time the Special Commission Bill had been passed and the Commission's sittings had begun, an uncomplimentary allusion appeared in my London Letter to Callan's share in the abortive proceedings taken by O'Donnell against the *Times*, whose "bonnet" for several years the latter had been openly said to be. One day in the Press Club, then housed in Ludgate Circus, an Irish fellow-member asked me if he might introduce Callan, who accompanied him. Before I had time to decline the unwanted privilege, Callan came forward and brusquely denounced my reference, threatening an immediate writ

for libel unless I said whether Parnell had inspired my statement. I treated his demand with contempt ; and as Callan, for personal reasons, was no more desirous of facing the witness-box than his associate O'Donnell, he contented himself with further blustering, and I heard from him no more. But he knew what I was thinking concerning him in the Commission Court that October afternoon.

O'Shea went on to declare that he neither knew nor had been told who had brought " the letters " to the *Times*, but admitted that he himself had offered to help that journal, though with fluctuations in his resolve, and that he had threatened retaliation on Parnell because of an angry—and unexplained—difference of three years before. As the witness approached this part of his narrative, he became more and more nervous. He unfolded his arms ; leant an elbow on the ledge and his head on his hand ; frequently wiped his face ; hurriedly stroked his chin ; and almost turned his back on the cross-examiner. It was a tangled tale he related concerning his personal relations with Parnell, whom he thought to have been sincerely opposed to the policy of dynamite and outrages. " Up to June, 1886, I believed him to be a man of the highest honour, but then my good opinion of him was utterly lost." The date thus given was precise, but it appeared that there had been an earlier incident of importance. " I was angry with him when I turned him out of my room in a Dublin hotel at the end of 1885. I simply ordered him to go. I used no force. I might have said

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I would be revenged." But in what way the earlier quarrel arose ; why, after so violent a scene, he was on such terms with Parnell in the following spring as to be in a position to compel that masterful man to force him on a bitterly hostile party ; and how he had been able to believe Parnell a man of the highest honour up to the ensuing June, " when my good opinion of him was utterly lost "—these were mysteries unexplained. An explanation doubtless could have been supplied from the series of letters from O'Shea to his wife, covering the years from 1882 to 1891, which she preserved but did not publish. All that is known concerning the problem now under note is that in one of 1885, according to her very uninforming summary, he complained of the " absolute baseness " of Parnell over a Clare election matter ; and that from the end of the following year the relations of husband and wife, to use her own phrase, were violently strained.

After this arousing episode of O'Shea, the Commission for three months pursued a very dull course. At most of the sittings for the following few weeks, I simply looked in, as there was nothing to attract special attention until after the resumption in January, 1889 ; but then matters began to move. Their most ludicrous phases were the constant haling before the Court for " contempt " of indiscreet partisans of both attackers and attacked, who, in the press or on the platform, had strayed beyond bounds ; but whether it was the Warden of Merton, the Editor of *United*



*Ireland*, or some other feverish speaker or writer, English or Irish alike, it all came to naught. Not until Februry 8th was there any true sensation, and then it came from the placing in the box of that most striking specimen of cold, callous, calculating political spy, who called himself Major Henri Le Caron, a Franco-American soldier of fortune. He was in reality a Colchester draper's apprentice, one Thomas M. Beach, who at twenty had gone to New York, changed his name, served with the Federals in the American Civil War, and thereafter joined the Fenians, whom for a quarter of a century systematically, and without arousing the slightest suspicion, he betrayed to the British and Canadian Governments, in whose pay he was.

"Le Caron" proved a perfect witness. Standing, as he well knew, in hourly danger of death at the hands of those he had sold into penal servitude, the self-attested spy, proud of his accomplishments, was absolutely cool and collected, thoughtfully listening to each question, and wording his answers with literary care. With reflective face, folded arms, and in staccato tones he gave details of his life which showed him devoid of scruple when serving a cause for which he claimed to act as a patriotic soldier rather than a paid spy. He had moved through twenty years from the American Civil War to the Special Commission among Irish desperadoes, joining in all their plots, and promptly communicating them. He cynically explained that his only reason for running the

risk of now volunteering evidence was because the case for the prosecution had been so lamentably presented ; but that he fully understood the risk did not escape such as watched his face, the more deadly pale because of standing out against his carefully trimmed dark moustache, slightly bald head, and tightly buttoned frock-coat. Day watched him closely, Hannen took frequent and Smith occasional notes, and the crowded court listened with intent. The longer he was in the box, the more easy he became. Webster with studied politeness had styled him "Major Le Caron" throughout. Russell tried to flurry him by alternately addressing "Mr. Beach" and "Beach." It had not the slightest effect. When Russell corrected to "confederates" the witness's use of the term *confrères* for his associates in criminal plots, he slightly shrugged his shoulders, and let the correction pass. The greatest cross-examiner of the day tried his every device to break through the spy's guard, but never touched him once. As a witness, "Le Caron" was the most lucid and imperturbable I have ever seen : as a cross-examiner Russell that time proved a complete failure. And "Le Caron," threatened with death on all sides, slowly passed out of the court unmolested, to live a further five years, and to die in peace after complacently writing "Twenty-five Years in the Secret Service." Thoroughly trusted all that quarter-century by Irish plotters in America, he had betrayed in turn their plans for two intended Fenian invasions of Canada and the first rising of Louis Riel,

as well as the later devices of the Clan-na-Gael. That the Salisbury Government allowed so eminently useful an agent to destroy his chances of rendering further service, was proof of the desperateness of the determination to destroy Parnell.

## VI

### PREPARING FOR PIGOTT

RUSSELL had not long to wait for re-establishment of the reputation as a great cross-examiner so severely shaken by the super-spy. But in a previous short interval, opportunity was given to one of his juniors, a then little-known young journalist-barrister-politician, Herbert Henry Asquith, to take his earliest chance as an effective practitioner in the same legal art. This was furnished by J. C. Macdonald, the *Times'* manager, who, against the advice of more cautious colleagues, had bought "the letters," though he knew Hartington had refused an offer of purchase, and would have nothing to do with their publication. Macdonald—a bland-seeming, middle-aged, obviously opiated, and essentially commonplace Scotsman—had replied to Webster in precise, cautious, and pauseful tones; but precision and caution largely disappeared before Asquith. Russell's junior, frequently prompted in whispers by his leader, adopted the line best calculated to flurry a witness long immune from personal criticism; and his slightly irritating manner caused Macdonald promptly to "give himself away." He flustered and

floundered, argued with counsel, wrangled with judges, and seriously hurt his own paper, while destroying all pretence to being a shrewd adviser on politico-journalistic affairs. As he stumbled along, there was frequent laughter, and Macdonald again and again showed his annoyance. When Asquith's questions suggested that the writing of "the letters" was not like Parnell's, he supplied the theory that all were more or less in a disguised hand except the signatures, a novel idea which provoked the court to a smile. Though he knew Hartington had declined to touch them before they were offered to the *Times*, and the *Pall Mall Gazette* had refused to have them for £1,000, he had taken no steps to find who were the original recipients or whence they had been obtained, frankly admitting that, from the very beginning and before he had made any inquiries, he had believed them all to be genuine.

Asquith then came to grips on one of "the letters" to which no special importance had previously by anybody been attached, but which was the original source of detection of the forgeries. This was among the second batch published, purporting to have been written by Parnell while in Kilmainham, four months before the tragedy in Phoenix Park. Assumed to have been written to Patrick Egan, the leading Land Leaguer in America, as "Dear E.," it asked, "What are these fellows waiting for?" and went on: "This inaction is inexcusable; our best men are in prison, and nothing is being done. Let there be an end of this hesitency.

Prompt action is called for. You undertook to make it hot for old Forster and Co. Let us have some evidence of your power to do so." No one who had ever talked with Parnell or seen one of his letters would have believed for a second that such a vulgarly worded incitement to wholesale outrage was his, but it was not this that gave the clue to the forger's identity. It was the misspelt word "hesitency" that caused Egan at once to name Pigott, an old and despised correspondent of his, to be without doubt the writer; but Macdonald, knowing nothing yet of this, caused Parnell to break into one of his rare laughs when he said he thought the letter was just what the Irish leader would have felt compelled to write in the circumstances, and "Mr. Parnell frequently uses the expression 'making it hot.'" The largest crowd yet seen in court gathered to hear the cross-examination resumed, even Morley putting in an appearance, with politicians, authors, actors, artists, and so many barristers that one of the Nationalist members' counsel was forced to stand. Cross-examiner and cross-examinee were speedily at loggerheads. "I'm not bound to give reasons in evidence," Macdonald retorted to an early question. Asquith passed this, but, when Macdonald replied to another, "You'd better not ask me that in cross-examination," counsel frigidly rejoined, "Excuse me: that's my business, not yours." Hannen ruled that the witness was bound to answer, but the difficulty was that he continually wandered from the point and, as I noted at

the moment, "he *would* explain." The chief thing was that, while he had abstained from all inquiries as to the place of origin of the second and third batches of letters as well as the first, he had paid for them an immediate total of £2,530, with supplementary payments to the intermediary of £1,780. Asked whether any particular name had been given by that personage, the reply, "Mr. Pigott's name was mentioned with a certain reserve," was uttered with such grave solemnity as to convulse the assembly; and when, on being closely pressed as to the "Dear E." letter, Macdonald said, "I would rather let the letter speak for itself," and Asquith meaningly retorted, with a grim smile, "So would I," the laughter was repeated. Thus the cross-examination went on to the end, the witness fencing, arguing, explaining, inventing fresh theories, until the judges became impatient, and hastened matters to a close. Macdonald left the box with the realization by all—except possibly himself—that he had seriously injured the reputation of the great paper he represented, and caused all men to wonder how he had become its managing head. And it would not at all have soothed him to know that his failure had given the first great chance to his young Liberal cross-examiner to come forward in the path that ultimately led to an eight years' Premiership.

The *Times* had accompanied the publication of the first and most famous facsimile letter with an assurance that it had subjected it to "the most careful and minute

scrutiny ” ; and this was how all scrutiny had been evaded. It was no wonder an attempt was made, immediately Macdonald had stepped down, to undo something of the damage he had done the prosecuting case ; but, when Webster rose to call as the next witness a handwriting expert of some contemporary note, named Inglis, to give his opinion on the authenticity of “ the letters,” there was a general murmur of sympathy with Russell’s protest that there ought to be produced the men from whom these admittedly had come, before any speculative evidence concerning them was allowed to be taken. The Attorney-General, however, was resolute to have Inglis first, despite the plain intimation from the judges that, while they would not dictate to him, they thought the natural and proper course would be to continue the inquiry as to the sources. Webster somewhat sullenly persisted ; Hannen curtly said, “ I regret the resolution arrived at ” ; and Inglis went into the box. Happily for both his reputation and his livelihood, he was not asked a single question, as if he had sworn, as he intended, to belief in the genuineness of the documents, both reputation and livelihood would have been lost. He was saved by the accident that, though Webster had been so obstinately anxious to put him to the front, the prosecution was not ready for him when he got there. Hannen at once asked Webster whether he had all the photographs that were to be examined. Webster could only reply, “ I’m afraid not all ” ; and, when he pleaded that those absent were unessen-



tial, and found for the first time the judges indisposed to give him the slightest assistance, he realized the tactical blunder he had made, and asked for an adjournment of ten minutes for consultation. This was granted, and Inglis left the box, not to enter it again, for Webster, on returning, said he would defer strictly to the Court, and call Houston, the intermediary between Pigott and the *Times*, and then Pigott himself.

Houston, described as a journalist, who had been a clerk in the Irish Unionist organization, was a slim young man, with dark hair, a light moustache, and a distinct Irish accent. He told a long and complicated story of his relations with Pigott from about August, 1885, when they projected together a "Parnellism Unmasked" pamphlet, to the period when, destroying from time to time all documents which presumably might prove awkward, they met again and again in Dublin, in London, in Paris, and in Lausanne to arrange for securing anything incriminating Parnell. They made such rapid progress that, as early as April, 1886, Houston approached G. E. Buckle, the *Times*' editor, with the Phoenix Park letter; but that shrewd and cautious observer of men and affairs declined to have anything to do with it. At a later stage, Macdonald proved more amenable, and paid Houston £500 for the first batch, £550 for the second, and £200 for the third, with an additional large sum for expenses—a process obviously calculated to assist production. The witness, who, during his examination-in-chief, had seemed perfectly cool, looking at the ceiling

reflectively when studying the precise words of his answer, visibly braced himself up as Russell rose to cross-examine. He was much flurried when plied with questions as to why and when he had destroyed many interesting documents, and particularly when he admitted that the most recent holocaust had not taken place until the Commission had been sitting two months. Asked whether he considered this procedure fair to Parnell, he replied, with evident sincerity, "I didn't think Parnell's position was the subject of consideration at all; and I wasn't likely to help him."

This answer caused the judges, who had watched him closely every time he referred to the burning of documents, to regard him even more grimly; but Hannen's face relaxed a little as the witness admitted that, when any documents incriminating Parnell were brought from whatever quarter, he had not pressed for too much information. And the whole court smiled as he declared that he had done all this, not for the love of the thing, but from a sense of duty. It was this last alone apparently that accounted for his receipt of large sums of money from both Irish and English supporters of the Unionist cause; for his destruction of a series of important documents; and for his final sale of "the letters" to the *Times*, after Hartington had declined to give advice as to their use, and Stead had refused to buy them for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. "Have you still faith in Mr. Pigott?" asked Russell. "I must confess my faith was shaken when he had an interview with Mr. Labouchere,"

was the unexpected reply, greeted with much laughter. But the witness showed decided annoyance when pressed for details as to his attempted sale of "the letters" in various quarters, protesting that this was a "breaking of the honourable seal of secrecy," only to be met by Russell's cool interjection, "That's a speech." But, through it all, there was nothing to connect Parnell with "the letters," except alleged statements by certain mysterious personages with black bags, who were said to have secretly supplied them to Pigott in Paris, with sometimes an expression of belief in their authenticity. And, when Houston left the box, all felt that, increasingly interesting as the proceedings were becoming, the real struggle had yet to begin.

## VII

### PIGOTT'S DISGRACE AND SUICIDE

THE crowning struggle began within the briefest possible space, when, at 2.45 on the afternoon of February 20th, 1889, Houston quitted the witness-box. Then, at long last, "the letters" themselves were made the subject of rigid examination, with the result of rapid exposure, four months after there had been opened for business a Commission which would not have been appointed but for their publication. When Webster rose and quietly called "Mr. Pigott," there could be no mistaking the "sensation in court" as there stepped into the box with slightly shuffling gait a frock-coated, stoutish-built figure of fifty-four, white-bearded, bald-headed, bland, smiling, and having the general appearance of a coarsely composed and rather cheapened Father Christmas. It did not need to be a Lavater to read the man in his face. Starting in Dublin as an errand-boy on the *Nation*, he became manager of the *Irishman*, in which capacity he tried to secure popularity in the usual fashion of the Irish journalist of that day—falling foul of the Government. This had brought

him into touch with Dublin Castle ; and it was not long before he tried to " double-cross " the authorities and the Nationalists alike. Selling his newspaper to the Land League, in the earliest 'eighties, he devoted himself to blackmailing and betraying his political associates, selling his information to a Liberal Home Secretary, begging from an over-trustful Chief Secretary, forging lies for a Conservative journal, or trying to swindle the American Fenians, with impartiality and aplomb. His reputation stank in the nostrils of every honest man in Dublin, whether Nationalist or official, Tory Solicitor-General or Nationalist advocate ; and it was now to be blown for ever into space.

In soft, slow tones and with hesitating manner, Pigott went through a carefully-edited story of his politico-journalistic career, but so drearily that many listeners left. Using his single-eyeglass with great deliberation to identify " the letters," the signatures of which, at the least, he attributed to Parnell, it appeared that this modern imitator of Titus Oates had copied his great original to the point of being always ready to produce fresh evidence as desired. When he found there was a profitable market for the first production of his pen, he promptly forged others ; and, as long as the demand existed, he was politely prepared to supply. They came to him " in a bag," a batch at a time, from mysterious sources which could not be identified ; and, throughout the impossible tale, he displayed the most perfect and almost abject

deference to the judges, smiling politely to Russell when brusquely enjoined to "Speak up." The first dramatic moment came on Webster saying, "It is my duty to ask you a specific question. Had you anything, directly or indirectly, to do with the writing of these letters?" Pigott's flabby face sharpened and colour deepened as he calmly replied, "Nothing whatever," incautiously proceeding, "it is quite untrue I forged them." Those in court were stirred to excitement by the unasked for denial; and this continued as Russell blandly requested the judges not to assume anything not in evidence, adding, "I will not yet characterize the witness." Interest deepened as Pigott told in detail of how on October 24th of the previous year—after the actual sittings of the Commission had begun—he had had an interview with Parnell and Labouchere at the latter's house at Queen Anne's Gate. There was a hush of attention as he related—"as well as I can recollect"—how Parnell began by telling him they held proof in their hands to convict him of the forgery of all "the letters." "Mr. Labouchere then took up the running, and was rather facetious. He suggested that I should go and swear I forged 'em, and get my certificate of indemnity from the Commissioners; and, as a further inducement, I would become very popular in Ireland"—whereat there was a general laugh—"and receive a torchlight procession," and the laughter was renewed. "I could scarcely believe he was serious"; and as the mirth continued, Hannen sternly interposed: "I must say,

whether this is true or not, it is not a fit subject for laughter." Labouchere, according to Pigott, next took him outside, and told him he must not say anything about money before Parnell ; but, when George Lewis, the solicitor for the defence, suddenly appeared, " I saw it was a plant. Mr. Lewis assumed his severest manner." " Severe manner," Webster mildly suggested. " Let's have it exactly," said Russell ; and Pigott went on. " He charged me with forgery. I denied that, of course"; and Lewis became more conciliatory, and said, if witness would do as he wished, he would be his best friend, but, if not, he would be prosecuted for perjury and forgery. " I was so flurried that I can't recollect what I said "; and Pigott's manner became more nervous, his fingers twitched, and his voice was so broken and husky that water had to be brought. He then related with circumstance how Labouchere again took him outside, and said he was prepared himself to pay him £1,000, but he was not to say a word of this to Parnell—who evidently was not in a mood to be blackmailed—and " I seemed to agree." But, at a subsequent meeting of these strangely assorted parties, " Mr. Parnell was not so pleasant at this interview as at the former, and he told me they were in possession of proof that I had committed other forgeries in mercantile transactions—forged bills with which I had swindled a Dublin bank. I denied the charges at once, but both Mr. Lewis and Mr. Parnell pretended to be extremely angry." Labouchere and Lewis together had pressed him as to

whether O'Shea had helped to get " the letters " and at the two latest interviews he denied this—" to the great relief of Mr. Lewis." But, as the witness went on, the smooth smile disappeared, the brows knitted, the face flushed, and the figure drooped. For Lewis admittedly had detected some of the false statements made to obtain money from Labouchere ; nothing from that quarter consequently was forthcoming ; and Pigott relapsed into the position of being called as a witness for the *Times*. It was no wonder Webster had postponed as long as possible the evil necessity for putting him into the box.

As those in court observed that, when Pigott told these tales of mystery and imagination, his body and spirit alike bowed under the strain, all realized that the great moment of the Commission was close at hand. His examination-in-chief ended tamely just after the luncheon adjournment on the second day of his appearance in the box. Reports of his astounding admissions were being published all over the town ; and, at the brief interval, every corner was crowded. Labouchere held a sort of levée ; Buckle, the *Times*' editor, and Aberdeen, afterwards Home Rule Viceroy, joined the excited throng ; and Parnell almost nonchalantly strolled in just as Russell, the examination-in-chief ended, rose for his supreme task. " Would you like to sit down, Mr. Pigott ? " he quietly inquired before starting the cross-examination ; and Pigott's prompt, " Oh, no," was put aside by Hannen's



grimly suggestive, "I think it's better you should." With similar quietude, Russell suggested that materials should be supplied for witness to write a few dictated words. "Now, Mr. Pigott," and Russell's voice changed to austerity, "write livelihood, likelihood, your own name, proselytism, Patrick Egan, Egan, hesitancy." As word followed word Pigott carefully wrote at a table in the box, the whole assemblage wondering. "Don't blot it, please," was the sharp injunction as Pigott was turning the paper to the pad; "pass it to me." In a flash, one saw that Russell had secured what he sought. Frank Lockwood, a fellow counsel, glanced at it, and, in a whisper all could hear, joyfully exclaimed, "We've got him." Webster, perturbed, suggested that the document should be photographed. "Don't interrupt my cross-examination, if you please," tartly exclaimed Russell, as he passed the document for preservation to Henry Cunynghame, an admirable Home Office official, who was the Commission's Secretary. It proved important indeed, the spelling of "hesitancy" as "hesitency," as in certain of "the letters" as well as in writings admittedly Pigott's, being one of the links in the chain encircling him. "I am not good at spelling," the wretched creature tried later to explain. In point of fact, he was not good at anything.

The remaining hour that opening afternoon passed interestingly but quietly, as Russell was evidently determined to play out time, and not unduly to alarm

the witness. It was a curious story Pigott had had dragged from him of his attempts, on pretence of supplying valuable information, to extract money from every Irish Chief Secretary from Hartington's time in 1870, and most Viceroys from Spencer's tenure of the position in 1873. His hesitation was marked ; and, when asked whether he had written to any Home Secretary tendering information in exchange for money, he ejaculated, "Tell me a specific instance, Sir Charles." "All in good time, Mr. Pigott, all in good time," somewhat airily rejoined Russell, who then led him into the tangled mazes of his pamphleteerings and plots. Rather nonchalantly he admitted that part of what he had written in the pamphlets was "accidentally untrue," and simply put in to strengthen the rest ; but the nonchalance vanished when challenged on certain of his begging and semi-blackmailing epistles. "My memory is a blank as to this letter," he exclaimed about certain of them, addressed to Archbishop Walsh, which had come as an obvious surprise, and much confused him : "the thing has completely faded out of my mind." "I've no doubt of that," Russell grimly commented ; "but try, try, try !" "It's no use," said the wretched witness, increasingly agitated : "I can't give any explanation of what is meant by this. It was an easy way of obviating the difficulties"—and in court a great hum went up. "I've no recollection of anything about it" ; "I've no notion what I meant" ; "I haven't the faintest recollection of the letter." "Turn your face to my lords and say that,"

enjoined Russell ; and, as Pigott obeyed, Day and Smith leant back in their chairs and regarded him with the closest scrutiny, while Hannen took notes the whole time, with an occasional severely penetrating glance at the witness. His hands trembled as he volunteered, " I say Archbishop Walsh deceived me. I thought he was too much of a gentleman to give up private letters." Towards the end of the day, he somewhat recovered his composure. And, amid a burst of laughter, loud and prolonged, in which the judges joined as they left the bench, the court adjourned on Pigott's explanation of one more incident : " I had something far more serious in my mind at the moment than this letter, but I have utterly forgotten what it was. It is not hermetically sealed up, because it's gone away out of my bosom."

All this was only preliminary, the crash coming the next day. Everyone concerned in any way with the case felt the crisis to be near ; and each inch of the court was filled. Spectators packed themselves in the gangways ; sat in the witness-box ; invaded even the bench ; while the corridor was thronged by eager ticket-holders fighting to secure that much prized rarity, a vacant place. An unprecedented crowd gathered early in the Strand, and grew with rapidity as the news of Pigott's astounding admissions spread. And, as the court emptied in the afternoon when Pigott was seen at the Palace of Justice for the last time, its occupants were eagerly seized, and forced to tell what they had heard. When Russell resumed in the morning

the Walsh letters were once more the theme. Pigott had seemed cool and refreshed after his night's rest ; but he very soon changed. Hannen, intensely serious and with a face like a thundercloud, looked straight in front of him, while Day and Smith gazed steadily at the witness. Pigott became half inaudible as he confusedly explained his circumstances when he approached Dr. Walsh. "The statements I made to the Archbishop were entirely unfounded." Hannen was startled by the frankness, and looked hard at the witness. "You deliberately sat down and wrote lies?" queried Russell. "Exaggerations," politely corrected Pigott, amid laughter; "I think there was very little truth in them." "Has your memory improved since yesterday?" "Yes, I think it has"; but, when he replied to a question, "I can't tell you exactly," Russell suggested, "Then tell us inexactly." In the midst of the fencing, Pigott more than once braced himself to answer bravely back; but the effort soon tired him, and wearily he passed his hand over his forehead to remove the perspiration and relieve the strain. And it was to be noted that, in his nervous and growing agitation, his voice curiously varied, for, almost inaudible when answering important questions, it was loud in reply to those relatively of small account.

Russell led Pigott through a maze of letters, some imploring, some threatening, and some suggesting "action"—so many, indeed, that the President expressed doubt as to the necessity. "We want this

gentleman painted by his own hand," explained Russell. "Wouldn't a sketch suffice?" asked Hannen. Russell shook his head: "We want to get to the bottom of this." "So do we," was the judicial rejoinder; "but you needn't use so very long a rope"—whereat there was laughter significant of much. Each detail, trivial as at the moment it might seem, had its place in an ordeal which steadily grew more ruthless. The President, after this relatively pleasant interlude, watched the witness with intensely serious look, which darkened to thunder. It did not disappear when Russell and Asquith took it in turns to read a series of Pigott's begging letters to W. E. Forster, that not altogether guileless Chief Secretary having once incautiously advanced to the informer £100, and then been often importuned for more. Day, customarily sad to severity, yielded himself to the ghastly humour of the situation. As begging-letter after begging-letter was read, he leaned back and laughed unto tears; while even Hannen once relaxed, as Pigott was shown to have told Forster he should not know peace of mind until he had repaid his loans.

But, after all, the main "letter" was the thing. When it originally appeared, Pigott had told Archbishop Walsh that he thought it doubtful, but not that he considered it a forgery. "How would you forge a letter, Mr. Pigott?" quietly asked Russell. "I've had no experience in that line," was the reply; and then, "I decline to put myself in that position."

Russell persisted, "Would you put delicate tissue paper over it and trace it against a window-pane?" "That's the way you'd do it," retorted Pigott. "But how do *you*?" pressed Russell; and Pigott replied, with hands rattling nervously on the witness-box ledge, "I do not feel competent to give an opinion." Later he angrily broke out: "If I did forge the letters I would not be here." "Not if you could help it," Russell grimly retorted. "How couldn't I help it?" Pigott vehemently questioned; but the President stopped the affray as Asquith once more took up the running by frigidly reading from yet another begging-letter "Bad as I am, I am always true to those who trusted me." This was too much for the gravity of all three judges alike. Day roared with laughter; the President bent low over his notes to hide the mirth that shook his frame, and the sombre Smith likewise succumbed to that which aroused laughter all round—except in the box, where the helpless victim writhed as he exclaimed, "It may be very amusing to you, but not to me." Pigott, who by this time needed a chair, had stood with head downcast, colour deepened, and eyes depressed, uneasily fingering his moustache, his forehead covered with a cold sweat, and his figure visibly shrunk. All he had said, all he had written, all the strange spellings in which he had indulged—and everything came out under cross-examination—proved him to have been the long-wanted forger. Almost under his breath he whined, "I don't pretend to be very virtuous;" and this, and "Spelling is not

my strong point," were probably the only truthful statements to be volunteered during the whole time he was in the box. Towards the end of the cross-examination the squalid tragedy nearly degenerated into a screaming farce, judges, counsel, pressmen, and general public alike being moved to mirth almost continuously by the astounding self-revelations given by a witness whose progress in fabrication had by now become a protracted agony. And as with bowed head, downcast eyes, and trembling form he shuffled from the court, I felt I should never see him again, thinking he would commit suicide that night.

Probably this is what both parties to the case expected—and, it may be, hoped—for, as if by tacit agreement, neither side took any steps to have him watched, and the authorities were equally neglectful. Pigott lingered in London two or three days; made a valueless confession to Labouchere; and having—as he claimed in his last huddled words in court—"fallen a victim to the wiles of the British enemy," he fled the country. When the court re-assembled three days later, it was announced, after a formal delay for calling the witness, that the bird had flown. "I apply for a warrant for his apprehension," said Russell. "I have already directed one to be made out," rejoined Hannen. But it was too late. Pigott had taken advantage of the fact that both the authorities and the parties concerned had put their blind eye to the telescope, and the unwanted bird had flown.

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Yet his flight availed him nothing. Penniless and a pariah, the wretched traitor, cheat, and blackmailer, on whose evidence the safety of a State had thoughtlessly been staked, shot himself within a fortnight when being arrested in Madrid.



## VIII

### THE COMMISSION'S SLOW MARCH

**A**MID an almost unchecked roar of talk in court on the morning Pigott's flight was known, Webster, perturbed and pale, rose to ask, in the unexpected circumstances, for a short adjournment. Russell was immediately on his feet with a challenge : " We deliberately charge Pigott and Houston with a foul conspiracy," an outburst which aroused wholly irregular cries of "Hear, hear!" shocking to the usher, but a safety-valve for tense feeling. The quarter-hour's adjournment was granted ; conversation rose and fell while the *Times'* counsel consulted ; and the quarter became three-quarters before they returned. Webster then, in a few coldly measured sentences, showed himself prepared to withdraw " the letters " from the record ; but Russell wanted more : " I claim in the interests of justice to make a statement." Webster interjected a technical point, but Russell at that moment held the winning hand. He told with circumstance and amid ever growing sensation, how, on the morning after Pigott's last appearance in the witness-box, he had gone to Labouchere's house,

stating his desire to confess. Labouchere sent for a neighbour, the then well-known journalist, George Augustus Sala; and it was in the presence of both that Pigott signed a written confession that all "the letters" were forgeries. The Bench suggested an affidavit, with the expression of opinion, "All this is really not addressed to this tribunal." Smith, after owning surprise that any had expected Pigott to be there, wanted to know how he had escaped, but no one seemed aware. When Russell pressed for a warrant for perjury, Houston, with very troubled face, produced the letter latest received from Pigott, asking for £33 due to him, as he expected to be prosecuted on that particular charge.

More attention was aroused by certain letters of Pigott to the *Times*, which Webster now, with forensic fencing, produced. In one written in the month after the Commission opened for business, which took a quarter of an hour to read, Pigott reminded Soames, the *Times'* solicitor, that that journal had promised liberally to reward him, and mentioned £5,000 as a fitting sum. But he was eager to be kept free from personal responsibility, as "you may take it that any proceedings that rely on me will fail." In the previous July, he had gone on, while the Special Commission Bill was passing through Parliament, Macdonald in writing, had guaranteed him secrecy and he had gathered that the editor and manager would go to prison rather than give up his name. "If I appear, the cross-examination will tend to discredit

my examination-in-chief," a mildly worded prophecy of what actually occurred that aroused much laughter. Soames had replied that he would not help him to leave the jurisdiction, and held to this, though Pigott—who declared that "Houston has deceived you, as he has already deliberately deceived me"—gave the suggestive hint that he should be helped to go away as best in the *Times*' interests. Russell showed himself desirous to know the date when Soames, now in the box, had first told counsel that Pigott was the source of supply ; and the significant reply came that it was not before the Special Commission Bill was passed. More significant of the heedlessness with which the gravest charges had been levelled against Parnell was the admission that the prosecuting solicitor had found no opportunity to inquire into the character of his chief witness, and had not delegated that duty to others. As far, indeed, as he knew, it had never been investigated by anybody. And George Lewis, the Nationalists' solicitor, equally with Soames of the *Times*, owned that no watch had been kept on Pigott, even when a criminality each had long known had become public property. It was all more than a little obvious ; and the exciting day ended on Russell again exclaiming, " We shall bring charges of forgery and perjury," and Hannen's grimly hinting, " First catch your hare."

Immediately the court resumed next day, Webster, in his most measured tones, took four minutes to say that the *Times* made full acknowledgment that " it

was not now entitled to say the letters were genuine," and that it expressed sincere regret. Russell voiced the immediately widespread feeling in saying he had hoped for a stronger statement, as it appeared to the public generally a grudging apology for a grievous wrong; but, as the main allegation against Parnell had been not only disproved but apologized for, Webster's frigid admission had to suffice. If Parnell himself was momentarily disappointed at the coldness of the *amende*, he had compensation in the overwhelmingly warm welcome accorded him by more than the Liberal and Nationalist members when he again entered the House, and by the congratulations of men of every political section. The most valued of all came from Sir Walter Barttelot, a venerable Sussex member of the solid squirearchy. I was talking to the Irish leader that evening, when man after man, Conservative, Liberal, and Nationalist, paused in passing to offer felicitations on the collapse of the chief charge. Among them was this fine specimen of typical Tory of the oldest school, who, stopping on his way to the library and shaking hands, said, "I congratulate you, Mr. Parnell." The Irish chief flushed with pleasurable pride, but quietly rejoined, "I thank you, Sir Walter"; and a most significant incident ended with credit to both. It was the only time in all our confidential converse I ever saw Parnell moved to such a degree by simple emotion. He steadied himself with an effort and resumed conversation with difficulty; but he would have been the

more impressed if he could have guessed that within a few days Coleridge, Russell's immediate predecessor as Lord Chief Justice of England, would be writing to that great advocate, "You heard, I believe, that from the very first I treated the letters with utter scorn, to which possibly my respect and admiration for Mr. Parnell contributed. I do not know him even by sight"—he was already a judge when Parnell entered Parliament—"so that my feeling is absolutely impersonal, and due only to what he has said and done." Coleridge's letter, unknown for many a year, was written two days before Pigott's death.

Parnell must have felt the greater satisfaction in what he knew of all this because the one point of difference he had had with his leading counsel right through was the extreme importance he attached to proving "the letters" a forgery. Mrs. O'Shea has told how "Once he became interested in the study of his handwriting for many years and those of his various possible (and impossible) imitators, he threw himself into it as whole-heartedly as he did into any other hobby. We spent hours in this study of calligraphy, and made some interesting and amusing discoveries." His absorption in this phase of the case annoyed Russell, who, after the Commission had opened, impatiently exclaimed to Barry O'Brien—his friend as well as Parnell's—"He is a selfish fellow. He thinks only of himself. He takes no trouble about any part of the case but the forged letters. But there are specific charges against others and against the

movement generally which have to be met ; and Parnell ought to trouble himself about these charges and ought to help us to meet them. But he will not even come to consultations except to discuss what directly concerns himself—that is, the forged letters.” Yet Parnell, from the practical as well as the personal and political point of view, was right in placing that issue alone to the front. What the then Conservative Solicitor-General publicly noted a quarter of a century later was recognized by most at the time—that when “ the letters ” were disposed of, even though the Commission declined to make an interim report on the one part of the case to which the public generally attached importance, interest in its proceedings died away.

This was the crowning hour of Parnell’s triumph. When, at eleven o’clock on the night of March 1st, he next rose to speak in the Commons, Nationalists and Liberals alike sprang to their feet in enthusiastic acclaim, even Gladstone leading his colleagues to do the like, and joining in the long-sustained cheer. “ Mr. Parnell was in no way upset by this extraordinary demonstration,” said the *Birmingham Daily Post* the next morning, “ but made one of his usual calm and self-possessed speeches, every period of which was rapturously cheered from his side ” ; and even the *Times* acknowledged the moderation of the speech. He gave apparently a different impression to those immediately around him, and who knew him well, to that conveyed to shrewd and skilled observers in

both the Press Gallery and on the floor of the House. "Why do you fellows stand up? It almost frightened me." This is the remark, addressed to the member sitting next him, attributed to Parnell by his elder brother, John Howard Parnell, writing long afterwards, and himself in America at the time. But it evidently had come to that brother from one who was present at this "height of Charley's glory," and who had added the detail, "He sat down, apparently unconcerned, though his pale face and the twitching of his hands betrayed his deep emotion." Sir Edward Clarke, then Solicitor-General, one of Parnell's most consistent and eloquent opponents, gave his Conservative supporters at Plymouth, after the divorce case and not long before the Irish leader died, his view of the scene and its principal. "It was an incident which might have disturbed the balance of mind of a smaller man. I saw Mr. Parnell erect among the whole standing crowd. He took no notice of it whatever. He had not asked them to get up. When they had finished standing up they sat down, and he took no notice of their rising up or their sitting down; and when they had resumed their places he proceeded to make a perfectly calm and quiet speech, in which he made not the smallest reference, direct or indirect, to the incident, extraordinary as it was, which had just happened. I thought, as I looked at him that night, that that man was a born leader of men—calm, self-confident, and powerful." This was the verdict of a strong political opponent; and the time of its delivery,

as well as the character of the man who delivered it, renders it of special note.

The Liberals as a party determined to do all in their power to show Parnell honour. The Eighty Club gave him a dinner which Rosebery was one to attend, and at which the Irish leader publicly shook hands with Earl Spencer, that Viceroy who at the time of the Phoenix Park murders was the object of all England's admiration as the "Red Earl," and of ultra-Nationalist denunciation as "Foxy Jack." A more striking popular demonstration of Liberal regard was at St. James's Hall, on March 12th, when John Morley presided at an overthronged gathering, held nominally to protest against the gaol treatment of Irish political prisoners, but in reality as a testimony of honour to Parnell. As the *Times*' reporter faithfully recorded, there was, when the hero of the evening came on the platform, "great cheering, the audience rising to their feet and waving their hats and handkerchiefs for some time"; while Parnell "on rising was received with cheers, which were again and again renewed, the people rising and waving their hats and handkerchiefs." It was only Parnell's second appearance on a distinctively Liberal platform in London, his first having been at Hackney three years before in support of Charles Russell's candidature at the general election of 1886, with a bright, pert, and pushing young barrister—Charles John, afterwards Mr. Justice and Lord, Darling—as his opponent. In view of later events, this previous association between Parnell and Russell



was of special interest ; and piquancy was added by the fact that the great advocate, fresh from his triumph before the Special Commission, was given almost as enthusiastic a greeting that exciting night as the leading politician himself. It may be that the warmth of welcome would have been even greater if the audience had known the personal sacrifice Russell had made to enable him to appear for Parnell. The famous counsel had for some years held a general retainer for the *Times*, which, as he himself told an intimate, was generous in remuneration. But, when the Special Commission Bill came before Parliament, he acted on a resolve he had taken some time previously, but at the *Times'* request had refrained from carrying out. He felt fettered in his political activities by this particular professional tie, and gave up the retainer, despite renewed pressure from Printing House Square. Political lawyers are often cynically denied a conscience. Russell in this episode proved his possession of one.

It is apparently of this gathering that Barry O'Brien spoke when alluding to "a great Liberal meeting held at St. James's Hall. Mr. Morley presided. Parnell was invited, and he accepted the invitation. It was arranged that Mr. Morley should meet Parnell at a given point, should drive him to St. James's Hall, and generally take care of him. They dined together, and then drove to the meeting. On the way Parnell thrust his hand into his coat pocket, and took out a little box wrapped in paper. Mr. Morley's attention was diverted. He knew something about Parnell's

superstitions, and probably suspected that this was a charm. Parnell treated the box with great care, unfolded the paper, opened it gingerly, and took out—a flower, which he immediately put in his buttonhole. By the time this operation was over the carriage stopped at St. James's Hall. Mr. Morley and Parnell alighted. The Chief had not spoken about politics, nor indeed about anything else, during the drive."

Parnell's biographer told this with, apparently, the double idea of showing his hero's sentimental tenderness for a flower from a woman, and his indifference to the opinion of a mere political man. But another reason for his silence and absorption during that carriage journey can be suggested. As Parnell came on the platform it was seen that he was carrying his left hand in a sling, and he spoke for half an hour in evident pain, carefully nursing his hand the whole while. I was present, and immediately afterwards asked him the cause. He told me it was more annoying than serious, for a few days before, while engaged on some of the chemical tests of which he was so fond, he burned the back of his hand, which caused a painful wound and much swelling, and it had to remain bandaged to prevent the air from reaching it. He added that, if it had not been for his promise to speak in public just then, no one outside his special friends would have known of the accident, which had not been mentioned even to the bulk of his Parliamentary followers ; and he wished as little as possible to be

made of the trouble. In point of fact, it was a very awkward moment for an Irish leader to meet with an accident when mixing explosive chemicals in the pestle and mortar prominent in the most faithful photograph of him I have seen.

But Liberal enthusiasm did not stop short at even these enthusiastic demonstrations in the House of Commons, at the Eighty Club, and in St. James's Hall. He was elected an honorary member of the National Liberal Club; but this compliment he did not even take the trouble to acknowledge, or as often as once to avail himself of it. After the split in the Nationalist party two years later, he more than once bitterly denounced the club and all its works. There was a suggestion from indignant members that his name should be struck off the list—quietly if desired, yet effectively; but the matter was let alone lest further complications might ensue. By that time all his followers save one had resigned their club membership, the only exception being Colonel Nolan, always a singular character, who remained solely because of his keen enjoyment of chess, so much played in the Liberal “temple of luxury and ease” in Whitehall Place.

From these excitements, one returns almost with reluctance to the Special Commission. In the interval between Pigott's collapse in the witness-box and his flight from justice, I had learned that Russell and his colleagues were resolved, when the authenticity of “the letters” had been disposed of, to announce that,

as they had always considered this to be the real question involved in the investigation, they would now retire from the case. "Should this be done," I added, "although the Commission would not necessarily close its labours, the end of the inquiry would obviously be near." By a tactical blunder, this resolve was not acted on at the moment originally intended ; and it was not for another two months, and until after Russell had spoken and Parnell been called, that counsel for the majority of the Nationalist accused withdrew from the proceedings. It may be that Russell desired to deliver the long address he had in contemplation, described by Hannen at its close, in a note passed down from the bench, as "a great speech, worthy of a great occasion." This was a valued confirmation of my forecast after its opening hour : "The commencement was very striking, and Russell evidently intends making the speech a great historical effort." During its eight days' course, Parnell one evening exclaimed to me, "Don't you think Webster must feel ashamed as he sits and listens to Russell's speech, and its masterly management of facts, and compares it with his own? It's a wonderful effort. He has a good deal of help from his friends, but his own share has been enormous. I don't know how he has done it. But," he sombrely added, "all the life of the inquiry went out with the forged letters : it's now perfectly flat."

It did not greatly revive even when, on April 30th, Parnell entered the witness-box. "Mr. Parnell," called Asquith ; and Parnell, looking paler than usual

in a black frock coat—on which, according to Mrs. O'Shea, Russell had insisted—and carrying a large black bag stuffed with documents, stepped to his place. As close knowledge of him had led me to anticipate, he proved an ineffective witness. The one whom the public had agreed to regard as "the strong silent man" of mythical value in the world's affairs proved diffuse, explanatory, argumentative, everything a perfect witness should not be. Asquith soon found the difficulty. "Are you a son of the late Mr. John Parnell?" he started by asking. Instead of the simple affirmative required, Parnell gave a long biographical sketch of that deceased parent. "Too discursive," was the note I made, as he persisted in going into details of how he had been politically affected by the passing of the Ballot Act three years before he entered Parliament. But he went on making needless speeches and offering unwanted explanations until the court yawned and the audience dwindled away. Twenty years later, I saw two other leading politicians similarly fail as witnesses. During the Marconi investigation by a Commons' Committee in 1913, Rufus Isaacs—then Attorney-General and later Lord Chief Justice, Ambassador to America, and Indian Viceroy, who from some effective angles was as great a cross-examiner as Russell—proved a miserable witness on his own behalf, and for the same reasons as Parnell. Meeting Lloyd George in the corridor as we left the committee room that afternoon, I gave him my impression of his friend's failure. He agreed: "But

I'm coming on to-morrow, and you'll see me avoid Rufus's mistakes." Knowing him well, I had my doubts. They were justified.

There was only one point of arousing or abiding interest during the whole of Parnell's time in the box ; and this was the historic reply to Webster in cross-examination that he had once deliberately deceived the House of Commons. "Why," he was asked, "did you tell the House on January 7th, 1881, that secret societies had ceased to exist in Ireland?" "It is possible," was the unexpected answer, "that I was endeavouring to mislead the House of Commons on that occasion." As that is the constant endeavour of politicians of every sort when in a difficulty—and markedly so of Governments when undesirous of telling too much—there was something ludicrous in the shocked outcry which was raised, as if Parliament were a Palace of Truth in which every speaker was bound, not only by honour but by oath, to utter nothing unvarnished. But no doubt could be entertained as to the bad political effect created by the admission, and this Parnell speedily perceived. It fell from him, he told me, in a moment of weariness at the end of a trying day. But, he added, "it wasn't Webster who saw the importance of the allusion, it was Henry James. As I stood in the box, I heard James say twice to Webster, 'Press that ; press that !' and it was not till James said it the second time that Webster seemed to see there was anything in the point. And yet it has injured me more than anything else

during the inquiry." I published this story within thirty-six hours of his death ; and Henry James, when next we met in the Lobby after my statement had appeared, gave it full confirmation. I mentioned the circumstances in which Parnell had related it, and with a slow smile the great lawyer said : " Mr. Parnell was correct but charitable. Though he must have heard, he did not tell *everything* I said to Webster."

"The Parnell Commission," as it was popularly termed—and as, indeed, Harcourt was the first to describe it in Parliamentary questions—which had threatened to collapse when Pigott fled, simply dragged on after Parnell's examination, and ceased to attract popular attention. So marked was this that when Russell on the 12th of July—as if in sarcastic celebration of a favourite Orange anniversary—led out all the counsel for the Nationalist members, what would have been a telling effect four months before fell absolutely flat. The imperturbable Hannen gravely observed, "Nothing is changed except that we shall no longer have the assistance of counsel"; and this solemn repetition of a venerable legal fiction raised only a passing smile. But, though the supply of witnesses of all sorts and values was exhausted with that same month, there was an October re-assembling, and speech-spinning filled November. Biggar insisted on giving evidence for himself, and amused the Court by quaint *gaucheries*. Davitt made a striking speech in explanation of a dramatic career, the honest patriotism underlying even its most mistaken moments

being doubted by none ; and from the Bench he won acknowledgment of his impressive effort. Russell having occupied eight days in an address in favour of the Nationalist members, James felt it incumbent to take twelve in his speech arraigning them ; and their respective partisans promptly published bulky verbatim reports, once glanced at, speedily set aside, and long since forgotten. Only three days after Pigott's flight, I recorded the rapid diminution in the public interest when "the letters" had been disposed of. "As long as their authenticity remained in question, so long were there crowds without and sensations within : now there are neither, and a sense of boredom is entertained by all in court." There was a feeling of relief after the tension, and I wrote, "It is pleasant to be able to relegate the Special Commission to a subordinate place ; and the proceedings have become so intolerably dull that no one refers to them." Russell's address and Parnell's examination re-aroused a flickering amount of attention ; but, as far as the world at large was concerned, interest in the Commission's sittings was at an end.



## IX

### ITS REPORT AND RESULTS

ON the very day of Parliament's resumption, February 11th, 1890, the Liberals began to force the fighting in favour of Parnell, fortified by the *Times*' admission in the Law Courts the week previous that "the letters" had been forged. Harcourt at once moved "That the publication in the *Times* newspaper of April 18th, 1887, of a letter falsely alleged to be written by Mr. Parnell, a member of this House, and the comments thereon in the said newspaper, is a false and scandalous libel, and a breach of the privileges of the House." A Ministerial amendment declined to treat as a breach of privilege the publication of "a letter purporting to have been written by Mr. Parnell, and of the comments thereon." Such a way of meeting the matter, after the *Times* had owned the forgery and paid five thousand pounds damages for circulating it, was so palpable an error of taste and judgment alike that Parnell's request that the letter should be plainly described as forged was immediately accepted by W. H. Smith. The Conservative leader of the House went farther, and

took the opportunity to express the Government's detestation of the act that had been committed, and its pleasure and satisfaction that Parnell had been relieved absolutely and completely from the imputation. Harcourt's motion was rejected, but by little more than half the normal Ministerial majority ; and the Government counter-proposal, as amended at Parnell's request, was then adopted.

This result satisfied no one ; and expectation ran higher than ever as to the contents of the Special Commission's report, known by this time to be agreed on though not signed. The document in the main had been drafted by Hannen, who had set himself to the laborious task in a Devonshire retreat, where he spent some days after the Commission's last rising, and just before resuming his seat as President in the Probate, Divorce, and Admiralty Division. A. L. Smith also prepared a framework of suggestions, but Day was content to add his conclusions, though he gave his services in the construction of the more analytical portion of the document. The whole was copied by a clerk of Cunynghame, the Commission's secretary ; and, when it was sent to the Government printers, so much care was exercised in distributing the " copy " in very small portions as effectually to prevent even the vestige of an idea of the general tenor being formed. But for the fact that no soldiers with loaded rifles stood over the type-setters as they worked, there had been known in no printing-office any such elaborate precautions over a public document since the

setting-up of Louis Napoleon's manifesto precipitating the Coup d'État of the fatal Second of December, 1851. The document had not been sent in bulk to the printers, but section after section, and sometimes by the single page. These having been put into type, the "copy" and the "proofs" were returned immediately to Cunynghame, who, by trusty messenger, conveyed a proof to each of the three judges. Then began the work of revision; and to such an extent was this process carried that, in several instances, almost entire pages had to be "composed" afresh. Hannen, assisted by Cunynghame, made the final revision, but not until each of his colleagues had received a third proof. When at last all was ready for publication, the copies were guarded with so much care that the Commissioners themselves did not receive theirs until the night they were available in the Lobby; and even Cunynghame did not know what was to be the hour of distribution until the Home Secretary announced it the same afternoon in the House.

It was two days after Parliament's assembling that Henry Matthews (afterwards Lord Llandaff and Chamberlain's only Conservative colleague for Birmingham) stated at question time that the long-anticipated Report had during the day been formally signed, and would be circulated among members at ten o'clock that night. Journalists, eager to be first with the conclusions, besieged those Ministers and members likely to know, but so well was the secret

kept that it did not leak out to a single evening paper. All I could get Matthews to say was that the report ran to about a hundred pages, though of the exact number he professed himself not quite sure ; the Attorney-General would commit himself no further than that he thought it covered between seventy and eighty pages ; and Henry James showed an equal uncertainty in regard to length. In point of fact, it contained, with appendices, 160 pages ; but it was for the report itself that all eagerly looked.

Far from the least eager was Parnell, who, meeting Cunynghame in the Lobby during the evening, asked what were the Commissioners' conclusions. These were confidentially given, evoking the characteristic response, " Well, really, between ourselves, I think it is just what I should have said myself." But, though Parnell thus knew, no one else in the Lobby did ; and, as the evening went on, anticipatory excitement grew. It was officially intimated that 650 copies of the report would reach Westminster at ten o'clock, the hour Matthews had named ; and the scene in the Lobby just previous to and during its earliest dissemination, was extraordinary without parallel. From half-past nine a rapidly growing crowd of members and Lobby journalists gathered round the door of the Vote Office, which is entered from the Lobby, eager to secure the very first copy. The throng at length proved so dense that Ministers left the Chamber to watch the unaccustomed sight, and the

door had to be locked to prevent the Vote Office being carried by storm. More wary folk than this pushing, jostling throng had noted that Matthews had said the document would first be available at the Sale Office, a department situated in a quieter part of the building. It was there that Pitt and I stationed ourselves, and there that, precisely as Big Ben boomed ten, we secured the earliest copies. As we hurried through the Lobby with our spoil, a huge bundle of the volumes was brought in on a messenger's shoulder for the Vote Office; but the locked door caused a momentary delay. The bundle was at once snatched from the protesting messenger, the string was cut, and copies were seized by a struggling crowd, temporarily lost to all sense of personal dignity and Parliamentary decorum. Then, after a rush in all directions with the news, came a calm; and of this quiet members took advantage to read and discuss what they had fought so hard to see.

A natural and very general disposition was shown to consider the matter more at leisure; but, meantime, the forecast of the findings I had been able to give twenty-four hours earlier was widely accepted as fairly crystallizing the conclusions. These on the general heads were strongly expressed regret that the Land League leaders had not sufficiently separated themselves from the organizations which included assassination or outrage among their methods, coupled with a declaration that there was no evidence to connect these leaders

with crime, while the acquittal of Parnell on every grave charge was complete. This last point is the only one that specially concerns me here, and it demands giving in full. "There remain," said the Commissioners, "three specific charges against Mr. Parnell, namely : (a) That at the time of the Kilmainham negotiations Mr. Parnell knew that Sheridan and Boyton had been organizing outrage, and therefore wished to use them to put down outrage. We find that this charge has not been proved. (b) That Mr. Parnell was intimate with the leading Invincibles, that he probably learned from them what they were about when he was released on *parole* in April, 1882, and that he recognized the Phoenix Park murders as their handiwork. We find that there is no foundation for this charge. The Invincibles were not a branch of the Land League. (c) That Mr. Parnell, on January 23rd, 1883, by an opportune remittance, enabled F. Byrne to escape from justice to France. We find that Mr. Parnell did not make any remittance to enable F. Byrne to escape from justice." When the further judicial declaration is added, "We entirely acquit Mr. Parnell and the other respondents of the charge of insincerity in their denunciation of the Phoenix Park murders, and find that the facsimile letter on which this charge was chiefly based as against Mr. Parnell is a forgery," every charge to which the majority of Englishmen had attached practical political importance dropped to the ground. All this was soon learned by the public outside. There was an enormous

demand for copies of the report ; and Parliamentary booksellers declared that no blue-book in their memory had had such an extraordinary sale. For the first few days, the demand largely exceeded the supply ; and the run remained even when the party summaries began to be circulated free.

Taking advantage of the revived popular interest, an eager band of Conservative members, in their hostility to Home Rule, privately urged the Cabinet at once to institute a prosecution, arising out of the general findings, on a charge of treason-felony against those nine of the respondents—including Davitt, Dillon, O'Brien, and William Redmond—who had been named by the Commission as having " established and joined in the Land League organization with the intention by its means to bring about the absolute independence of Ireland as a separate nation." But not only would this have missed Parnell, who was the principal object aimed at, but it would have been repellent to every idea of English fair play. All those named had fully submitted themselves, either personally or by counsel, to the jurisdiction of the Commission ; they had withheld no information that was demanded from them ; and they had not been reported as having attempted deliberately to mislead the Court. Consequently, by the rules which had always governed such investigations, they were entitled to be let alone. And so they were, but not until after one more bitter Parliamentary struggle, which did not injure the

Nationalist members but incidentally destroyed Randolph Churchill.

Yet, though partisans might become excited, the Commission's report left the public cold. When it was found that, while denouncing the seditious and violent side of the Land League agitation, which no one had doubted, the judges held that of the three specific charges against Parnell one had not been proved and the others were without foundation ; that they certainly acquitted him of the charge of insincerity in his denunciation of the Phoenix Park murders ; and that the notorious " letter " was a forgery, the bottom dropped out of the " Parnellism and Crime " agitation. Not a single Englishman who had been accustomed to shake the hand of a Nationalist member shook it the less warmly because of the Special Commission ; and the report might well have been left to be digested at leisure by those who cared. Yet, as has been noted, a number of ardent Unionists desired otherwise, and pressed the Government to take proceedings against certain of the Nationalist members for charges of inciting to outrage ; but, as these did not include Parnell, the idea found little support outside themselves. The Cabinet, after considerable hesitation, and at one point determining to do nothing, at last hit on a middle course, which pulled them through at the moment but satisfied none

W. H. Smith, as leader of the House of Commons, moved a resolution adopting the Commission's report,



thanking the Commissioners for their just and impartial conduct, and ordering the document to be entered on the Journals. Gladstone submitted an amendment, reprobating the charges and particularly those against Parnell, and expressing "regret for wrong inflicted and the suffering and loss endured, through a protracted period, by reason of these acts of flagrant iniquity." This amendment having been rejected, the debate might well have closed ; but Louis Jennings, the Conservative member for Stockport, Churchill's warmest admirer and closest political friend, desired to move a further one, showing precisely how he regarded the whole affair. He had supported Ministers in the first division, from which Churchill abstained, as Jennings himself originally had intended. Churchill had further resolved to take no part in the debate, a course from which, unhappily for himself, he departed ; but Jennings persuaded him to agree to support his rider condemning "those responsible for the accusations of complicity in murder brought against members of this House, discovered to be based mainly on forged letters, and declared by the Special Commission to be false." Churchill's promised support aroused the frenzied wrath of the *Standard*, then a powerful Conservative journal, which denounced his "iniquity and folly" in terms representing the average party opinion of the time. And that opinion became bitter to intensity when, without warning to his attached follower, and thereby earning undying resentment, Churchill intervened before Jennings could submit

his amendment. Once on his legs, he seemed to lose all self-control ; and his frenzied attack on the Government contained one almost unreportable passage, which helped to ruin his career. " The future position of Lord Randolph Churchill in English politics," I that night wrote, " after what all who heard it appear to agree was the most astounding speech he has ever delivered, is attracting much attention in party circles. Among the Conservatives feeling runs very high, and there are rumours of action being taken by the committee of both the Carlton and the Junior Carlton, to which clubs he belongs. Many Liberals also express condemnation of the violent language he permitted himself to use, and do not conceal the opinion that any alliance with him would be worthless and dangerous." And, despite various later flickerings of hope at intervals, March 11th, 1890, proved Randolph's fatal night.

Thus in smoke and confusion, and after a vehement protest from Parnell against the manner in which the forged letters had been used as a political engine against him and his cause, the matter ended ; and, as far as the general effect on English politics was concerned, the Special Commission might never have sat. But, even while it had been sitting, Parnell had proved how illusory was the idea that he could have taken his case at any time to the Law Courts in any part of the United Kingdom, with the hope of obtaining effective redress. " You saw," he said to Ministers in this

very debate, " that it was impossible for us under the circumstances, or for anybody under the circumstances, to prove that they were forgeries " ; and he had found by experience of the Courts in England, Ireland, and Scotland alike this to be so. On August 10th, 1888, three days before the Special Commission Bill became law, he issued a writ on the *Times* for libel, claiming as damages £100,000 ; but he did not for some time serve his statement of claim. Pending this, he brought in the Court of Session in Edinburgh, on the day " Le Caron " entered the witness-box, another action for damages. The *Times* immediately set up various technical pleas in law, the main one of which concerned the question of jurisdiction, claiming that it could not be sued in Scotland ; and the action was dismissed with costs against Parnell. He at once started an Irish action ; and the *Times*' Dublin Correspondent—the then well-known Dr. Patten—gleefully exclaimed, " Mr. Parnell having been routed in Edinburgh has fallen back on Dublin, and rallying his scattered forces is preparing for a new campaign. The first movement, which was in the nature of a surprise, took place to-day [February 12th] in the Exchequer Division," when the two Irish law officers of the recent Liberal Government moved on Parnell's behalf to issue a writ out of the jurisdiction against the publisher and printer of the *Times*, which was granted. But then matters badly dragged and ultimately fell through ; and Parnell returned to his original action in London, serving on the *Times* his statement of claim on April 16th,

1889, two months after the Pigott exposure and the official withdrawal of and apology for the forged letters. But, because of this delay in delivery of particulars, the *Times* succeeded through three stages in the Law Courts, involving two appeals, in delaying the trial of the action until the following November. Even then, despite renewed hard fighting by Russell and Asquith, it secured a further postponement until January, 1890, urging that the case ought not be heard until the Commission had reported. Meantime, it paid forty shillings into court, formally pleading that this sum was sufficient, which the plaintiff as formally denied. This was the issue raised : only the amount of damages had to be decided : but there was a superbly wide margin of difference between the *Times*' estimate of forty shillings and Parnell's claim for one hundred thousand pounds.

At this point of further adjournment, the *Times* seemed still to think of seriously fighting the case, and sent by Soames a brief to Edward Clarke, the Solicitor-General, naming Henry James, his predecessor in law officership by a dozen years, as one of his juniors. But Clarke was wary. He had watched Webster ; and, though he did not blame the Attorney-General for having accepted the brief in O'Donnell's action which precipitated the trouble, he did not intend to commit the same mistake. Ministers were ready to allow him to do as he liked ; but " I fear," he told Salisbury, " that some of our friends in the House of Commons would not understand, and would

be inclined to resent, my putting it in the power of our opponents to say that both the Law Officers were in the pay of the *Times*." At no time in his career, did Clarke display more shrewd political prescience.

"The interests of the *Times*," Clarke had written to Salisbury in the December, "are quite safe in the hands of Sir Henry James"; but that distinguished lawyer also fought shy of further burning his fingers, and a less-known counsel was in his stead. On the opening day of term in January, 1890, Asquith was once more to the front, endeavouring to obtain fuller particulars of the circulation of the *Times* when "the letters" were published; but, as the result of much negotiation, the affair very soon came to a quiet end. The *Times* had asked that the trial should be postponed until after the Special Commission reported; but on February 3rd, ten days before the document was signed, it evidently had what the late Lord Curzon of Kedleston once described as an intelligent anticipation of events about to occur, and agreed that the record should be withdrawn and a verdict entered for Parnell for £5,000, without an added word of either explanation or apology. Nothing more was announced in court, this simple statement coming from Asquith—made a Queen's Counsel by the Conservative Lord Chancellor the very same day—and being assented to by the defendants. The *Times* in its next issue simply mentioned the matter in its law reports, but devoted a first leading article to the thesis: "A good deal of

the popular interest in politics is concentrated, in these days, on persons rather than on principles. We are not inclined to quarrel with this tendency." It was a tendency the attempt to gratify which in one particular instance had cost the *Times* a huge fortune, and temporarily lost it much of its old and well-earned fame.

Thus, for the moment, all seemed to be settling down ; but, as the later developments of that eventful year proved, it was a decided misfortune for Parnell that, within a week after the Special Commission reported, Biggar, his Parliamentary colleague from the earliest stages of the troubled path to success, his most fearless of counsellors, and the one in whom he placed greatest trust, suddenly died. Though, in his last Parliament, Biggar took little part in debate, his services to the Nationalist Party in the capacity of "business manager" were so great that the loss to his fellows proved impossible to repair. He was not merely their Chief Whip but controller of the Parliamentary fund out of which, in those days before statutory payment of members, they were paid ; and his personal ascendancy, gained as having first shown the way by Parliamentary obstruction to their Promised Land, was second only to that of Parnell himself. Outside Parliament, those Englishmen not the least interested at the moment in the passing of this strange figure were the Special Commissioners, before whom he had insisted on pleading in person. Hannen, a judge not easily provoked to a smile, felt compelled

again and again to allow his face to relax at some more than usually striking irrelevancy ; and, before the Commission closed, Biggar had established his popularity as firmly at the Law Courts as in the House of Commons. That assembly, happily for the Empire, has always been a shrewd judge of character, and long before the end had ceased to regard Biggar as the mere boor-buffoon depicted in party caricatures. When he had gone—with great suddenness, for he was acting as teller in a division one night and was dead at six the next morning—members realized how much better and more generally he was liked than had been supposed. The asperities of his early Parliamentary manner had much softened ; and while during his last session he scarcely spoke, even the strident “Hear, hears” he had once been so accustomed to indulge in grew fewer and fainter, and towards the end entirely ceased. With all his peculiarities, I found him quietly courteous on every occasion of our meeting ; and, on his death, there reached me from various quarters testimony to his possession of very deep feelings, and his capability of strong and faithful affection. When he passed, indeed, the Commons forgot the partisan in the person, and generally agreed, “We could have better spared a better man.”

Biggar was a quaint mixture of qualities. Not long before his death, he became a Roman Catholic, a religion towards which for long he had had leanings. One of the fruits meet for repentance he first furnished

was to change his residence to Clapham, for the special purpose of assisting the good work in relieving the poor and distressed, succouring the sick, and tending death-beds, which the Bon Secour Sisters had begun to carry on there. His purse was always open for their needs ; and he took up his dwelling near by so as to be more accessible to the Sisters, who consulted him on every administrative point. Among his curious personal traits was a strong aversion from giving any opportunity for his signature being copied ; and, when he wrote a letter at the House, he allowed it to dry without at any time using blotting-paper. He carried this idea so far that when, as he very frequently did, he signed an order of admission for strangers, he could always be seen waving it in the air as he went through the Lobby and corridor, so that the signature might be naturally dried.

When thus suddenly deprived of the counsel of that member of his party in whom he placed most confidence, Parnell did not at the moment realize the greatness of his loss. For a time things seemed to go for him even better than before. There was no falling off in the allegiance of his Parliamentary supporters, no weakening in the alliance with his Liberal friends. As the months went on, he again and again manifested his political force, and more than once brought the Ministerial majority down to danger-point. And, when Parliament rose at the end of the session of 1890, he was at the height of his unchal-



lenged Nationalist leadership and far-reaching power. But there had already begun to gather the storm, soon to burst, which was to destroy his chieftaincy and ruin his cause.

## X

### DIVORCE AND DISCREDIT

**T**HUS matters stood at the prorogation of Parliament in the early autumn of 1890. But between August 18th, when it rose, and November 25th, when it re-opened, a political earthquake had changed the face of British affairs, and affected not only their immediate but their future course. This resulted from an action for divorce, preceded by calculations and followed by consequences not generally understood at the moment, and not wholly explicable now. Of the political side of the transaction—and with the moral the rival party wire-pullers at the outset did not affect concern—I knew much from within. This was communicated not alone by Parnell himself but by the most active Liberals who combined to depose him from a leadership they thought would discredit their cause, as well as by certain among those Unionists who had joined to launch the thunderbolt. It is not an agreeable or, in all regards, a savoury tale; but it had aspects not yet told which need relation.

In the spring of 1889, after the Pigott exposure and Parnell's rehabilitation, it was plain that, if the Irish leader's political mastery was to be overthrown, some

personal device was necessary. Much angling by Chamberlain on behalf of the Radical Unionists and by Morley of the Home Rule Liberals had gone on to gain Parnell's acquiescence in one or other of their rival land proposals. For a time Chamberlain thought he could come to an accommodation ; but, when I told this to Morley, he sardonically replied, in the first half of an old phrase the whole of which was later made politically famous by Chamberlain, " He forgets that he who sups with the devil—you know," and went into the House. This anticipation of what later became so well known as a Chamberlain phrase, is not the less quaint because Chamberlain himself had previously more than once anticipated phrases subsequently made famous by others. As early as July 18th, 1885, and when there had just come into office that " stop-gap " government of Lord Salisbury he loved for some months to denounce, Chamberlain, in mourning to Labouchere " the present attitude of the Irish leaders is not at all encouraging to Radicals," added, " The Irish members must ' stew in their juice ' with the Tories until they find out their mistake." This use of the Bismarckian utterance about the Parisian French during the war of 1870 he repeated after three months to the same industrious correspondent—" For my part I believe in leaving the Irishmen to ' stew in their own juice ' "—and before Harcourt on the platform recommended his fellow Liberals to " leave the Tories to stew in their own Parnellite juice," an utterance never completely

forgiven him. But a far more striking instance of Chamberlain's adaptation to new conditions of an old phrase, always in these times assigned to a very different politician, was in closing a letter to Labouchere at the Christmastide of that same year 1885 : " I believe the true policy for everyone except Mr. Gladstone is 'wait and see.' " To his lasting political injury, Asquith used the phrase thirty years after, and all thought it his own.

In regard to the matter immediately under notice, it turned out as Morley had thought. No land arrangement agreeable to Chamberlain and acceptable to Parnell was palatable to Salisbury ; and the last of the negotiations on which it might have been possible to found a Unionist-Nationalist policy came to an end. With it came another thing—a further attack on Parnell which ended in his downfall. A month after Parliament had risen in August, 1889, I was asked by one on the inside of the Liberal Unionist " machine " whether Parnell would be politically ruined by a divorce, the then recent Dilke instance being given as a promising precedent, and Captain O'Shea, it was added, being believed to be willing to take proceedings. Apart from instinctive detestation for such a political method—though this was not an instinct to affect a " machine " politician—I pointed out the risk of the Unionist leaders seeming to countenance this proceeding, all the greater a risk by their dependence on so very bruised a reed as O'Shea, who already had twice " double-crossed " Parnell, once over the Home

Rule Bill and again on the forged letters. Besides, I added, the scandal was not new. It had not merely been talked of in private but alluded to in print for at least seven years ; had been on every political lip during the Galway election episode of the spring of 1886 ; had been clearly hinted at in the *Times* the following year ; and had been revived by the appearance of O'Shea before the Special Commission as a witness, not only politically but personally hostile to Parnell. In view of both the staleness of the accusation and the weak and vacillating character of the accuser, I doubted whether, as a matter of tactics and especially after the Pigott collapse, the Unionist managers, who were indicated to be wavering, would find it pay.

But counsels of caution proved unavailing ; and the die was soon cast. Precisely what brought it about during that fateful autumn is difficult to be known with precision. A note in Mrs. O'Shea's biography of Parnell summarizes very drastically " a long series of letters from Captain O'Shea [to his wife] dating from 1882 to 1891." In this summary only one full date is given, but that chances to be a date of much significance in connection with the divorce. At some unspecified time—but apparently from the context the summer of 1889—"O'Shea wrote to his wife's solicitor suggesting that she should, for her children's sake, declare her renunciation of communication with Parnell, and then consulted Chamberlain on his difficulties." It was early in September I was spoken to on the matter, and O'Shea's

first interview with Cardinal Manning, to whom, as a Roman Catholic, he turned for advice, was—according to the authority already given—on October 19th, when the question of separation as against divorce was discussed. Manning delayed his decision until December 4th, and then declared in favour of submitting the case to an Ecclesiastical Court, which would report to Rome. But O'Shea "had already become impatient"; and, avowing his hesitation to approach a tribunal not having the right to administer an oath, "respectfully intimated his intention to take the case into the English Divorce Court."

This is the story as afterwards published by Mrs. O'Shea; but it differs in some essential particulars from that contemporaneously given to his counsel by her husband. In consultation in February, 1900, O'Shea told Edward Clarke, who was to lead for him, that it was in the previous October or November he had become aware of the intrigue, and had accepted a friend's advice to lay the matter before Cardinal Manning. That head of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England, however, according to O'Shea, served him badly over the matter. "Together with his statement," he related to Clarke, "he sent to the Cardinal copies of certain incriminating letters which had somehow come into his possession. He told me that a fortnight later he was glad he had taken the precaution only to send copies, for he found that the Cardinal had consulted Sir Charles Russell and Mr. George Lewis, and the documents had been shown

to them. Indignant at this, he demanded their return, and determined to sue for divorce."

In any case, it cannot be without significance that the first solicitor to whom O'Shea went—and the precise date remains unknown—was Soames, still working hard for the *Times* before the Special Commission. Yet, though Soames had successfully submitted to an appellate tribunal that this work was so heavy that Parnell's latest action against that journal ought, strongly against the plaintiff's plea, to be postponed for several further months, he promptly welcomed this fresh client, accepted his instructions, and prepared to act. As Clarke afterwards observed, however, "the impropriety, to say the least of it, of his acting in such a case at such a time soon occurred to Mr. Soames, or was suggested to him, and he advised the Captain to employ someone else. But, with marvellous ill-judgment, he suggested the name of Mr. Day, a young solicitor of only ten months' standing, who, apart from his inexperience, was the most unfit man, except Mr. Soames himself, who could possibly have been employed, for he was the son of Mr. Justice Day, one of the Special Commissioners," who had not yet reported. It was the younger Day who prepared the petition and served the citation, retaining Clarke as "leader"; but the Solicitor-General finding, apart from other considerations, how unfit Day was to conduct so important a case, immediately went to see his father, the Commissioner, one of his oldest and closest friends. "To my surprise

he did not at first seem to see the objections to the son conducting a divorce case against a man upon whom the father was at that very time sitting as judge in grave charges of criminality, and said he did not think he ought to prevent his son having a case which would be very profitable, and useful in other ways ; but eventually he took a different view," and another firm of solicitors was engaged. This was fortunate : if what was happening had become known, Mr. Justice Day's reputation as an impartial adjudicator on the Special Commission, openly doubted at the outset by the Nationalists, would at once have vanished among the public generally.

"The whole business was full of puzzles," Clarke has written ; and this is especially true in the case of these earliest beginnings of the proceedings for divorce. Though O'Shea told his counsel that he had no proof of the intrigue until October or November, 1889, he had consulted a "friend" on the question of taking action before writing to Manning in the middle of the former month, and rejecting the Cardinal's advice in the December. And he then made such good speed in taking his own course that, after engaging Soames as his solicitor, he changed over to the younger Day, for it was the latter who was acting for him when the formal proceedings in the last-mentioned month began. This is shown on the official "Draft Citation for service on Mr. Parnell," given me when there was "no further use for it"; and this is a historic document of note. Endorsed,



"In the High Court of Justice. Probate Divorce and Admiralty Division. Divorce. O'Shea *v.* O'Shea and Parnell. Draft Citation for service on Mr. Parnell. E. F. Day," it was numbered "Cause No. 3419." "Charles Stewart Parnell, of Avondale, Rathdrum, in the County of Wicklow, Ireland, Member of Parliament," was cited to appear, because "William Henry O'Shea, of 124 Victoria Street, in the City of Westminster, Justice of the Peace for the County of Clare," had filed a petition for a dissolution of his marriage with Katharine O'Shea, on the ground of adultery. This document, which assisted in a sordidly grim fashion to make history, is noteworthy in its date, "London, the twenty-fourth day of December, One thousand eight hundred and eighty-nine." It was thus that on the Christmas Eve of 1889, "Edward Francis Day, of 46 Bedford Row, in the County of Middlesex, Solicitor for the Petitioner," celebrated the festive season by serving the fatal citation on Parnell.

Immediately the petition was filed, I noted that, when the trial came on, there might be some explanation of an answer O'Shea had given at the Special Commission, which, though enigmatical, was not sought to be amplified by either side. In swearing, but with certain reserves, that Parnell had written the letters Pigott had forged, O'Shea declared he had always regarded the Nationalist leader in the most favourable light until the summer of 1886, when his opinion underwent a change. What caused that

alteration it was not either side's interest to ask. If the reply disclosed a personal grievance, it would have detracted from the presumed impartiality of O'Shea and hurt the *Times* : if it had contained allegations which could not be immediately refuted, it would have injured Parnell. Yet one would have liked to have heard more of a singular scene suggested by O'Shea to have occurred even earlier than " the summer of 1886 " thus named by him. " I was angry with Mr. Parnell," he said in the box, " when I turned him out of my room in a Dublin hotel at the end of 1885. I simply ordered him to go, and used no force. I may have said I would be revenged, but I never said I had a shell to blow him up with dynamite." This puts the opening of the quarrel back to the winter of 1885 ; but it happens that, in the summer of four years earlier, there had been one which might have proved of deadly import. " Captain O'Shea's suspicions of improper intimacy between Parnell and his wife were aroused so early as 1881," says Barry O'Brien. Coming one day to Eltham, where the O'Sheas had a house, though the husband usually stopped at his chambers in town, " he found Parnell's portmanteau in the house. He at once flew into a rage with his wife, and sent a challenge to Parnell." It is to be noted in passing that, according to the story the husband told his leading counsel nine years later, it was in much the same fashion that, in the October or November of 1889, he became aware of the relations between his wife and Parnell : " he had gone into a

room adjoining her bedroom at Walsingham Terrace, Brighton, and had there found Mr. Parnell's dressing utensils and some of his clothes." The second discovery, however, was followed by a more prosaic and practical result than the first—a successful divorce case, and not a threatened duel.

On July 13th, 1881—and the date is of serious significance—O'Shea, writing to Parnell as "Sir," said, "Will you please be so kind as to be at Lille or at any other town in the north of France which may suit your convenience, on Saturday morning, 16th instant. Please let me know by 1 p.m. to-day, so that I may be able to inform you as to the sign of the inn at which I shall stay. I want your answer, in order to lose no time in arranging for a friend to accompany me," the friend being The O'Gorman Mahon, who had acted both as principal and second in many duels in forgotten Irish times. But, though Parnell wrote that he was willing to go abroad as desired, and O'Shea in his anger himself brought his former guest's portmanteau from the Eltham home to Charing Cross, there was no duel. Mrs. O'Shea's sister, Mrs. Steele, afterwards wronged by being brought into the divorce action, came to see her, "and patched up a peace between myself and Willie; and Mr. Parnell, while making arrangements to go abroad to meet Willie, explained to him that he [Parnell] must have a medium of communication between the Government and himself, that Mrs. O'Shea had kindly undertaken the office for him, and,

as this would render negotiations possible and safe, he trusted that Willie would make no objection to his meeting her after the duel. . . . Willie then thought he had been too hasty in his action and, knowing that I had become immersed in the Irish cause, merely made the condition that Mr. Parnell should not stay at Eltham." It would all read like a burlesque if it were not for Mrs. O'Shea's tragic addition : " From the date of this bitter quarrel Parnell and I were one, without further scruple, without fear, and without remorse."

The ill-met pair had then been acquainted exactly a twelvemonth ; and, as in almost every other important matter affecting them, contradictory stories are told concerning the way and the when they first became known. An elder sister of Parnell (Mrs. Emily Monroe Dickinson) in " A Patriot's Mistake," a singularly self-revealing but evidently honest book, has narrated how " Charles first met the lady for whom he later on sacrificed all the hardly won fame and success of years, even his popularity, his ambition, and life itself, at Lady K——'s. . . . Mrs. O'Shea was then considered very pretty, and fascinating to a degree. About ten years Charles's senior, she was still in her prime. With her it appears to have been a case of love at first sight. In her infatuation for the attractive and distinguished young Irish leader, who was generally regarded as so unapproachable, and icily indifferent to the blandishments of the fair sex, she seems to have forgotten all ordinary caution, and to have acted

from the beginning with the *abandon* of one who considers the world well lost for love. At first, and for long, Charles was as adamant to the fascinations of the charmer. Once he even placed the ocean between himself and temptation, but adverse fate played into the hands of the woman who so madly worshipped him." That fate, according to the sister's story, told in all obvious faith, took the form of a severe illness acquired in Kilmainham, out of the worst effects of which he was nursed by Mrs. O'Shea. But this circumstantial touch destroys the narrative's credibility, for, while the Irish leader was actually in Kilmainham, Mrs. O'Shea bore a child of which both the lovers with strange pride claimed Parnell to be the father.

Mrs. O'Shea, indeed, has told with astounding frankness—up to a point—the whole of this fatal love story ; but there is one omission in a singularly outspoken narrative. She gives a great number of Parnell's most intimate letters, but never one of her own ; and she affords no indication of those very early and rapid advances to an understanding, in which she must have shared, which led him to write to her plainly showing his love within two months of his earliest communication. Her own story is that, piqued in the summer of 1880 by his failure to attend her dinner parties, she went to the House of Commons with her sister ; sent in a card asking him to come out and speak to them in Palace Yard ; asked him why he had not been to her house ; and gained his promise

to be her guest. The very night of that dinner, according to her, he confidentially told her of an early love affair ; thereafter she went frequently to the House to meet him ; took him for many a country drive ; had tea privately with him at his hotel—and all this in the first two months of acquaintanceship. The mutual love which had evidently developed was deepened during the autumn when Parnell, at her husband's wish, was a guest at Eltham, and the wife, in an illness of his, " nursed him assiduously, making him take nourishment at regular intervals, seeing that his day-sleeps were not disturbed, and forcing him to take fresh air in long drives through the country around us." Matters then had come to such a point that Parnell felt he could write in October, 1880, to " My own Love," in the next month to " My dearest Love," and in December to " My dearest Wife."

No need exists to follow in detail the ten years' progress of this intrigue. Even before the husband made the Eltham discovery in July, 1881, " flying rumours perhaps had reached his ears. But it was too late, for I had been swept into the avalanche of Parnell's love ; too late, for I possessed the husband of my heart for all eternity." O'Shea, as has been shown, " patched up a peace " on the condition that Parnell should not stay at Eltham, a condition speedily broken. By the time Parnell was in Kilmainham, their looked-for child was a cause of anxiety to both the lovers ; its birth and speedy death, while he was still in gaol, was an even greater blow ; and

his keen desire to be with her once again was a determining, though at the time unknown, cause for his eagerness to be free. O'Shea, despite the grim warning of the previous July, is to be understood as having suspected nothing of all this, or of the fatherhood of two other daughters of his wife, which Parnell—and later they themselves—always claimed. It is an ugly story from every point of view ; and the shifts and subterfuges its chief actors were forced to employ rendered, when their relations were at last exposed, the ruin complete.

No satisfactory explanation has been given—it may be doubted whether such could be furnished in any like case—of the wonderful fascination Mrs. O'Shea must have exercised to sweep a man like Parnell so completely off his feet that he was willing to sacrifice his reputation and even his country to his love. His sister Emily, though jealous and resentful of the woman who had brought her brother down, testified to Mrs. O'Shea's fascination and her absolute devotion alike. The elder brother, John Howard Parnell, met her only once, and that after she was widowed ; but he spoke with kindness concerning her. "She seemed," he wrote after a quarter of a century, "just such a woman as would attract Charley, a brilliant conversationalist keen on society, and giving the impression that altogether, with her talent and fascination and her undoubted regard for him, she might have, under other circumstances, exercised a great influence in Irish politics. . . . I often wished for an opportunity

of [again] seeing her, but it never came." Even O'Donnell, while taking the opportunity to launch a further bitter gibe at his dead enemy, paid later a tribute to her charm. T. P. O'Connor—who, though so faithful a follower of Parnell for many years, never even saw Mrs. O'Shea—has described her as "a clever, handsome, intelligent woman." That she held her own through a tangled political period in dealing with such masters of intellect as Gladstone, Morley, and Chamberlain is sufficient to attest the truth of two of these adjectives. Doubts can be expressed as to the exactitude of one of them ; but she must have been abundantly provided with charm.

The divorce action, when at last begun, simple in itself, though complicated in its consequences, was not brought to trial for nearly a year. The respondent and co-respondent at the outset put in a plea of simple denial, amended later by Mrs. O'Shea into an allegation that her husband had condoned to, connived at, and condoned her offence, and counter-charging him with a like offence with her sister, Mrs. Steele, a wanton accusation, promptly denied and finally abandoned. But, though the action was occasionally alluded to in the course of 1890, very little public attention was accorded. Gladstone was greatly perturbed until he received an assurance through Morley, always the recognized intermediary, that Parnell felt certain he could as completely dispose of this charge as of the forged letters. Neither Gladstone nor Morley seemed to recall that Parnell himself, beyond his personal



denials, had given little help to that exposure. Labouchere, during the fight over the Special Commission Bill, and when in close association with Parnell, bitterly complained one night in the Lobby that the Nationalist leader, after getting up in the House and boasting what he could prove, had not as much as a scrap of paper—quaint anticipation of a long-afterwards fatal phrase—to back him up; and, as a matter of fact, it was not Parnell's evidence but a packet of Pigott's letters, almost accidentally preserved by Egan, which sent the forger to suicide. In every matter of documentary record, indeed, Parnell, either through carelessness or lapse of memory, was apt sorely to disappoint the expectations of his friends. In the course of the Special Commission Bill debate, he one night strongly attacked Chamberlain, founding his charges on certain written communications he asserted to have passed between them. At the moment, Chamberlain took no heed, whereupon Parnell renewed the assault. Then a reply was made to such effect that leading Liberals expressed to me in the Lobby the opinion that the debate had damaged the Irish leader. When a correspondence followed in the *Times*, it was found, to the infinite annoyance of Parnell's English sympathizers, that he did not possess certain communications from Chamberlain on the Irish Local Government problem he had been threatening for two years to publish, even once openly declaring in the Commons' dining-room that he would do so. The version of the incident his friends gave was that

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he simply could not find the documents, but it was quite another version he furnished me. When Chamberlain accepted, in the columns of the *Times*, a challenge to publish the communications that had passed between them in 1884-85, Parnell told me he should wait before doing anything, adding, "I wrote three letters to him : he wrote none to me. But I have a lot of his to another person on other subjects, which will be of interest." Whether "another person" veiled the identity of either Captain or Mrs. O'Shea was never explained.

As the time for the trial closely approached, public interest began to grow, and rumours as to how it would proceed and result multiplied exceedingly. The Liberals were satisfied with what they believed to be Parnell's assurance to Morley that he would come as triumphantly out of the ordeal as he had already done from that of the forged letters. Nationalists were told of a similar assurance given in writing to William O'Brien. When the trial was near, all kinds of conflicting reports came to those engaged for O'Shea. One day rumour had it that Parnell's solicitor had no instructions ; on another that a staff of clerks were at work at the Brighton residence preparing briefs ; while on a third O'Shea told his counsel that it had been intimated to him that he could have £20,000 if he would abandon the suit. Clarke apparently had not the curiosity to ask where this sum was to come from, and yet it would have been interesting to know the answer. Parnell at the moment

was virtually a bankrupt, and no second "National Tribute" was at all likely to be raised to buy off O'Shea ; Morley, even, three days before the trial was assuring Gladstone, on, as he always contended, Parnell's authority, that there would be a triumphant issue, and therefore, no such offer was likely to come from that quarter ; Parnell's political foes assuredly had no reason for paying such a bribe. The whole story of the £20,000 offer adds one more to the mysteries of this strange affair. And yet, there were others. According to Clarke, Parnell, some time before the trial, entertained the idea of leaving England with Mrs. O'Shea, and taking the two girls, born in 1883 and 1884, who were unquestionably his daughters, the eldest of the three, born in 1882, having died when three months old ; and he consulted Inderwick (a well-known divorce barrister, and afterwards a judge of that Division) whether there was any European country in which Mrs. O'Shea, in spite of the orders of an English court of law, would be able to retain the custody of these children. As, at the trial, Inderwick acted on O'Shea's behalf as junior counsel to Clarke, there can be no doubting the authority for this ; and yet, in the circumstances, it is one further matter that is inexplicable.

At length, on Saturday, November 15th, the case came on and, to the surprise of all, immediately collapsed. Parnell's neglect—or failure—to obtain the services of Russell as leading counsel had been noted by shrewd observers ; but even the shrewdest

were not prepared for the astounding fact that he had briefed no counsel at all. The petitioner's representatives came into court absolutely unknowing what was going to happen ; and they shared the general surprise when Lockwood, who led for Mrs. O'Shea, practically contented himself with stating, immediately the judge's seat had been taken by Sir Charles Butt—who had tried the first action which ruined Dilke, while Hannen had tried the second—that he did not intend taking any part in the proceedings. Parnell, who was in attendance on subpoena, sent in a message by George Lewis, asking Clarke to dispense with his appearance in court for the purpose of identification, and the petitioner's counsel made do with a few recently taken photographs which accompanied the request. Clarke then, in the surprising circumstances, made as short a statement as he could, and called only a few witnesses to prove salient facts, his conduct of the case throughout being a model of courtesy and restraint. No purpose would be served in reviving now the details which, through one not unnatural but complete misunderstanding, gave rise to many a cheap jest in the pantomime season then so near. In themselves they sufficed to justify a verdict ; and Clarke might have finished the same day, but he wanted to call the respondent's sister, to deny publicly the charge against her. The case, therefore, went over from the Saturday until the Monday when, after a little more evidence and a short summing up, the jury gave the only verdict, and a decree *nisi* was

pronounced. Who could have advised bringing the counter charge, or why Parnell permitted it, is, as Clarke has said, a mystery. "The charge against Mrs. Steele was utterly baseless and wanton; while of course the plea of connivance was in effect an admission of the adultery."

Clarke thought the explanation of the sudden collapse was that Parnell's solicitors believed down to the last moment that O'Shea would not appear in court; and he suspected that the pleas of connivance and condonation were put on the record with the idea of making it more easy to bribe or frighten O'Shea into abandoning his suit. Mrs. O'Shea says plainly that Parnell would not fight the case, and she could not without him. "What's the use?" he said to her. "We want the divorce, and, divorce or not, I shall always come where you are." Lockwood to the last begged him through her to contest the issue, but all without success. He evidently persuaded himself that, even from such a predicament, he would emerge triumphantly. "There will be a howl, but it will be the howl of hypocrites," he exclaimed to his partner the night before the trial began. Two nights after, when all was virtually at an end, and London was ringing with alternations of denunciation of Parnell and speculation as to his future, he quietly strolled, travelling-cap drawn over his eyes, into the London office of the *Freeman's Journal*, then in the Strand. Chatting coolly with its London Correspondent, the late James F. Tuohy, an admirable journalist whom

he necessarily knew well, as I myself did, he asked to see the full manuscript report of the previous day's proceedings. At the moment, it was being revised by a sub-editor ; and Parnell, looking over his shoulder, calmly read it slip by slip, occasionally correcting some point in the evidence with " It wasn't quite like that," or " It was rather different in reality," as if he were a mere spectator personally unconcerned with the affair. On the night following, when Mrs. O'Shea's Brighton solicitor brought her a copy of the divorce, " we were very happy, and Parnell declared he would have the decree framed. We made many plans that evening of where we should go when the six months had passed and the decree made absolute." Neither dreamed that, in less than a further like term, Parnell, discredited, deposed, and defeated, would have passed to his death.

## XI

### DEPOSING "THE DICTATOR"

**Y**ET, for a moment, the full political consequences were by most folk unforeseen. While, over the Dilke case, the one immediate and then still recent precedent, public sympathy had been plainly with the petitioner, it was largely absent from O'Shea; and it was doubted in the earliest hours by various observers whether the effect would be as politically overwhelming in the later as in the earlier instance. But Gladstone was staggered. He had written to his chief whip, Arnold Morley, on November 4th, "I fear a thunder-cloud is about to burst over Parnell's head, and I suppose it will end the career of a man in many respects invaluable." But on the 13th, only two days before the trial, he was reassured by a statement from John Morley, his most trusted lieutenant, that there were grounds for an impression that the Irish leader would emerge as triumphantly from the new charges as he had emerged from the obloquy of the forged letters. Then came the crash on Saturday, November 15th; and on the Sunday, Gladstone wrote to John Morley, "It is, after all,

a thunder-clap about Parnell. Will he ask for the Chiltern Hundreds? He cannot continue to lead? What could he mean by his language to you?" Later it will be seen that Parnell always contended that Morley had misunderstood or misconstrued that language; but, at the moment of Gladstone's writing, he was not only at the *Freeman's Journal* London Office coolly treating the matter as one of no personal concern, but was directing the issue of the usual leader's summons for a meeting of the Nationalist members at Parliament's opening a week later.

"To-day's result," I wrote the night the decree was granted, "had been so completely discounted by the collapse of the defence that it caused no excitement here. What certainly aroused surprise was the virtually simultaneous publication of the Nationalist leader's summons to his followers to rally at the opening of the session, as that is accepted as an indication that Mr. Parnell means to 'take it fighting.' " There was some uncertainty that evening whether he would be present at the party meeting, in which case Justin McCarthy, as sessional vice-chairman, naturally would preside; "but, of course, no one acquainted with the political situation thinks of him for a moment as anything but a nominal and temporary leader." "It is difficult," I said, twenty-four hours after, "to discover, in the midst of much that is palpably insincere in the denunciation of heated partisans on the one side and the apologia of equally heated



partisans on the other, what the early future is likely to bring forth. One fact, however, may be taken as a postulate in dealing with the situation, and that is that it will be long, if ever, before Mr. Parnell can again wield his old personal influence in the House of Commons. . . . The course which suggests itself as a probable one for him to follow is virtually to absent himself from Parliamentary life until the period is passed [when he could marry Mrs. O'Shea], by which time much of the present heat of feeling, and all of it that is purely artificial, will have died away, and his conduct as a whole may be viewed in a cooler light."

But this was a suggestion that did not at all appeal to Parnell, when more pointedly and directly put in the three words, "Resign, marry, return." This was the message widely believed at the time to have been telegraphed from South Africa by Cecil Rhodes, an adviser he had reason to regard, seeing that Rhodes only two years before had sent him £10,000 for the Home Rule cause. Parnell, daily and hourly influenced by Mrs. O'Shea, grimly stood by his resolution. He was assisted to this by a difference of opinion at the beginning within the Liberal ranks themselves. Some Liberal members contended, in the hurried consultations immediately following the divorce, that the matter did not in its essence in the least affect them in a party sense, and that it was one for the Irish people alone to decide. They admitted that Parnell, in the course of political negotiations, had recently been a guest at

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Hawarden ; but they claimed, in fairness to their chief, that that was when the Irish leader was generally understood to have denied, categorically and without reserve, the allegations made against him. They asserted, moreover, that, beyond a common identification of electoral and Parliamentary interests in furtherance of Home Rule, there had been no such fusion between the Liberal and Nationalist parties as would entitle the one to interfere in the domestic concerns of the other. In support of this, they adduced Morley's speech at the St. James's Hall demonstration of welcome to Parnell after the Pigott exposure, in which the Liberal lieutenant said there was no compact or alliance between the two parties beyond the attainment of self-government for Ireland. The statement had seemed somewhat to stagger the audience, among whom I sat ; but Parnell, I noted, at once bowed his assent.

The storm of public opinion, which was far from confined to party lines, rose rapidly to a cyclone. It proved vain for Parnell's friends to plead that he had not only declined to add perjury to his moral offence but was prepared to marry Mrs. O'Shea immediately it was legally possible, virtually abstaining from Parliamentary activity meantime. Hugh Price Hughes, a Wesleyan minister of very wide influence, voiced the revolt of "the Nonconformist conscience"—the first use of a much worked phrase ; and this had been as plainly invoked against the Radical Dilke five years previously as against the Nationalist leader now. Three

days before the Commons met, it was clear that the strength of feeling against the continued leadership of Parnell which had developed among the Liberal rank and file had astounded their chiefs, who were further alarmed by the surprising pronouncements of the Nationalist members. The National League—a recent revival of the old Land League—at once passed a resolution of unabated confidence. The Lord Mayor of Dublin, presiding over a meeting in Parnell's support in Leinster Hall, bluntly told the English people that they had no more right to criticize Parnell's private action and motives than to interfere with him as a Protestant if he chose not to go to church on Sunday, or eat meat on Friday. And T. M. Healy's unlucky comparison at the same gathering of his leader to Charles II, in order to apply to the unsympathetic Davitt the old story, "No, no, Jamie; no one will kill me to make you King," was not only maladroit, but, in the light of the acrid antagonism he so soon displayed towards his old leader, positively mischievous. Yet that acrid antagonism was but the accumulated dislike of several previous years. Healy, at the outset of his political career, had lain under special personal obligations to Parnell. "The Chief" in later times had reason, as he thought, for distrusting Healy; and he particularly resented the lukewarm support given to his efforts to arrange with Gladstone a satisfactory Home Rule Bill in 1886. Though Parnell could at that time have known nothing definite of Healy's confidences to Labouchere, intended for communication to

Chamberlain, that he suspected much is shown by the fact O'Brien made public forty years later that the quarrel between the two, whatever its precise cause, "came to a head in a message from Parnell to Healy, forbidding him to join Joseph Chamberlain at a dinner-party, which the Irish leader suspected to have been organized at a critical juncture as part of an intrigue against Gladstone and himself." And distrust and dislike on the leader's part became so deep-rooted that, when counsel for the Nationalist members were being chosen to appear before the Special Commission, Parnell, to use O'Brien's words, "wantonly aggravated the quarrel by such an act of impolicy as refusing his brilliant lawyer lieutenant a brief in the trial." That slight, which Healy resents and O'Brien regrets to this day, explains much. Because of it, Healy's avowed devotion to his leader one week was politic : his savage defection the next was personal : and the difference is to be largely accounted for.

Gladstone was greatly perturbed ; and the fact that he had entertained Parnell at Hawarden only a short while before increased his annoyance. It is true that the visit was at a time the Nationalist leader was understood to deny the allegations against him, and that such denial regarding previous grave charges had been fully justified. As far as the public generally were concerned, the very recent relationship of host and guest stood, and it was freely used against the Liberal leader. It would be unprofitable to try to trace in

detail the bewilderments and intrigues of that intervening week between the divorce decree and the coming together of Parliament. But what weighed most with Gladstone (who at the outset was fully prepared to allow the Irish people to settle the matter themselves) was the report by Harcourt and Morley, on their return from the annual conference of the National Liberal Federation, held that year at Sheffield. Though the divorce case had not been publicly mentioned thereat, the delegates from all parts of England were practically unanimous in refusing any longer to support Home Rule if Parnell remained leader of the Irish party. Gladstone clung to the belief that Parnell would intimate to him the intention to retire from that position, but up to the following Monday, the day before Parliament's re-assembling, no communication of any kind came from the Irish chief. The Liberal leader then told Morley that, "while clinging to the hope of communication from Mr. Parnell to whomsoever addressed," he had thought it necessary, in view of the Session opening the next day, to inform Justin McCarthy that "notwithstanding the splendid services rendered by Mr. Parnell to his country, his continuance at the present moment in the leadership would be productive of consequences disastrous in the highest degree to the cause of Ireland." If Parnell remained leader, indeed, it would, in Gladstone's opinion, "not only place many hearty and effective friends of Ireland in a position of great embarrassment, but would render my retention of the

leadership of the Liberal Party, based as it has been mainly upon the prosecution of the Irish cause, almost a nullity." Morley, to whom Gladstone gave a letter to be conveyed through the usual channel to Parnell, apparently did not tell his leader the very vague indication which, a few days before the trial came on, Parnell himself had given of his future course. They had dined together at Brighton, and Morley is asserted by Parnell's accepted biographer to have asked in substance, "Suppose this case goes against you, which is possible, what will you do?" and the reply was, "Depend upon it that the proceedings in the Divorce Court will not oblige me to make any change in my position." Morley understood from this that Parnell believed he would emerge scatheless. Parnell afterwards claimed that his meaning was that he would hold his ground whatever happened. It was one more of the many muddles marking this case throughout that led straight to catastrophe.

Tuesday, November 25th, the day of Parliament's re-assembling, proved a date to be marked in political history. To the consternation of the Liberals, Parnell was unanimously re-elected to the Irish leadership; Gladstone formally and at once submitted an ultimatum that either Parnell should abdicate or the Liberal-Nationalist alliance be dissolved, he himself resigning the Liberal chieftaincy; and all sections at Westminster were agog with excitement. The only one wearing a detached air was Parnell, who came into the Lobby that afternoon looking

better than was his wont, seeming perfectly at ease, and reciprocating with all his old coolness the greetings accorded him. From the manner in which he said, "Wait for the meeting," when I asked what was likely, I felt certain he intended to "sit tight"; and his decision to do so was at once communicated to Gladstone in a letter read on the front Opposition Bench with manifest annoyance. It was passed to Morley, who immediately went to see Parnell, Russell joining the consultation later, but all to no effect. Gladstone was deeply annoyed. He had written the day previously the letter Morley was to get delivered through the accustomed intermediary, but no reply had come. I was told by one in closest touch with the Liberal-Nationalist negotiations that the advice in that letter to Parnell to withdraw from the leadership was so unpalatable to Mrs. O'Shea that she destroyed the communication without showing it to him. The fatal consequence was that Parnell felt hurt at hearing nothing from Gladstone; Gladstone was aggrieved at having no acknowledgment from Parnell; and matters were made worse when the Liberal leader, having, as a last resort, requested Justin McCarthy, who might have been thought a far more trustworthy Nationalist intermediary, to convey his intentions to the party meeting, found that they were never mentioned thereat, and that the Irish members had taken their decision without knowledge of his resolve.

There immediately followed what proved the crowning tactical error of all; and, though the accounts

given by those concerned in it are somewhat confusing, the main points are clear. Gladstone, extremely annoyed that no intimation of his ideas had been given at the Irish party meeting, agreed to publish the letter to Morley setting forth his views of the political situation. His lieutenant took it for this purpose to his namesake, though with no relationship, the chief Liberal Whip ; and Arnold Morley at once sent for Pitt of the Press Association, to whom I was talking in the Lobby at the time, asking him to come to the Opposition Whips' room. There the Gladstone letter was dictated to him, and with all promptitude he went to the Press Gallery smoking-room to write it out from his shorthand notes. "When I had sent away a good part of it to the Press Association office in Wine Office Court," Pitt immediately afterwards recorded, "Professor Stuart came up and asked me to stop its publication. I asked him for his authority, and said I was publishing it on the authority of the chief Liberal Whip. I asked Professor Stuart to get Mr. Gladstone's authority to stop the publication. He then went away, and I saw him no more. As a matter of fact, at the time that Professor Stuart intervened, part of the letter was probably in some of the newspaper offices, and it was then scarcely possible to stop the publication." That proved to be the case, for the crisis-creating letter appeared in a late edition of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, where most of the Nationalist members for the first time learned of it. They were so greatly disturbed that many of



them gathered for a further, but informal, party meeting ; but Parnell sat stonily in the Commons' smoking-room, and refused to attend. He had been elected leader at the regular party meeting, and only at another such could the question be re-opened ; and to that position he steadily held throughout the crisis. Writing in later years, his elder brother—who at the time of these happenings, was living in the United States—put down all the mischief, not so much to the Gladstone letter as to its communication to the Press before the Irish Party or, according to him, Parnell himself had had an opportunity of considering. "It was published in the evening papers, and many of the Irish members actually in the House did not know of its existence until they saw it in print. . . . Gladstone had thrown Charley overboard, and that by a communication published behind his back." There was the sting, and it rankled with Parnell's intimates, but it remains to be guessed whether he himself shared the feeling. "When the secret history of this past week comes to be written," I said on the eve of the fatal meeting of the Irish Party in Committee Room 15, "one part that will be cleared up is as to how Mr. Parnell failed to receive in good time a full account of Mr. Gladstone's now historical letter to Mr. John Morley. I am given to understand that, in point of fact, he did not see that document until it appeared in a newspaper, and that even late on this same night his conversation with his intimate friends indicated that he did not apprehend the true purport of Mr.

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Gladstone's words, which had reached him only in a modified or filtered fashion. There is good reason to believe that Mr. Morley took special pains that he should know the contents of that document before the fatal Tuesday meeting. How then did Mr. Parnell miss it? The answer to this question, when it is able to be told, promises to relate not the least sensational event in a peculiarly sensational time." Irish Nationalists to this hour believe that it was all due to the maleficent mischief-making of Morley and Harcourt. This I have never believed: there was muddling in the former quarter, but not maleficence. How far the main cause of the personal estrangement between Gladstone and Parnell was due to the blind adoration of a woman, stung to mistaken action by no other motive than pride in her lover, but ruining him in the result, can never now be known.

After the events of that opening day, even those Liberals who had entertained the belief that it would be safe to leave the matter to the Irish members became convinced that such a course would prove disastrous. The Nationalist members had met, not to abandon but to glorify Parnell; one of their leading organs had roundly called the English people "thick-headed," because they had censured his conduct; and there was no sign of their recognition of the strength of affronted feeling on this side St. George's Channel. That strength, as developed among the Liberal rank and file, had greatly surprised their leaders, who were made to feel that the Home Rule cause would sustain irre-

trievable damage if Parnell continued at his post. Meetings in its favour which had been contemplated in various English towns were being postponed or abandoned, because of the personal cloud that had passed over the political horizon ; and the idea that the storm would blow harmlessly over if Parnell withdrew temporarily from public life and returned to Westminster six months later, in the possession of improved health and a marriage certificate, died away, never to live again.

Members of all parties had separated on Parliament's opening night in a state of babbling confusion. Parnell had held silently aloof from the main body of his old supporters when they held their informal meeting ; but he took the chair at the adjourned regular meeting the next day. The moment he came in, the change that had come over the majority of the party in the intervening twenty-four hours was made apparent. To those closely in touch with the situation, two incidents attending this Wednesday meeting stood out as ominous for Parnell—the one that he was not received on entering with the same ringing cheers as on the previous day, and that it was Sexton, who at the earlier gathering had moved his re-election, who now appealed to him to retire, a combination of contrarieties explained to me by one who knew Sexton well as arising from the fact that, while on the Tuesday he had meant his proposal to be accepted simply as a golden bridge to withdrawal. he was so astonished that it had not been availed of and so aggrieved that

Gladstone's intimation had been kept from him, that he felt bound to execute this rapid turn. He carried many with him, and the balance of opinion turned so markedly against Parnell that I at once noted that, whether he delayed his decision until the next meeting or meantime made a virtue of necessity, his disappearance from the Irish leadership was inevitable. But at the moment he made no sign. He sat listening attentively to the speeches for and against retirement, saying not a word ; and when, after much plain but relatively cool speaking, it had been decided to adjourn until the following Monday, December 1st, he quietly left the chair and the room. But he was not quiet long, for he promptly proceeded to take a step which made the breach between himself and the Liberals complete. He telegraphed to those of his colleagues who were in the United States on a money-collecting mission—O'Brien, Dillon, T. P. O'Connor, T. D. Sullivan, Timothy Harrington, and T. P. Gill—his urgent wish that they would take no steps until they had seen his manifesto in reply to Gladstone. He submitted that document to a small band of his immediate friends at a private meeting, to which, during its progress, he summoned Justin McCarthy. When he had read to that long-trusted supporter this overlong, in parts involved, and in others violent document, he sought McCarthy's opinion, and had it in the sentence, " I disapprove of every word." Asked if he objected to anything in particular, McCarthy pointed to Parnell's reference

to the possibility of his being thrown to "the English wolves now howling for my destruction." "Take out the words, 'English wolves,'" said McCarthy. "I will not change them," retorted Parnell; "whatever goes out, these words shall not go out." McCarthy saw it was of no use protesting, and at midnight left. The next morning, the manifesto appeared in all the papers; and, two days later, the great struggle over the Irish leadership began.

Parnell, speaking at Limerick in the following month, asserted that, on the day before this confidential conclave, he saw McCarthy and gave him an outline of the intended manifesto, and that McCarthy at once communicated it to Gladstone. According to the Liberal leader, who denied the accuracy of this, McCarthy told him simply that there would be a bad manifesto, but did not describe the contents. These, indeed, reached Gladstone in an almost dramatic way. He had gone to bed on the night of its issue, and was asleep when very early in the morning, on a violent ringing of the front-door bell, a servant going to the door was confronted by a messenger from a London newspaper, bearing with him printers' proofs of the manifesto. Untimely as was the hour, the Liberal leader rose and at once studied the document. With the morning hours came Morley, and the two remained together a considerable period. Gladstone, who expressed most emphatically his indignation at what he considered the deliberate misrepresentation therein of his words and actions, was agitated to a

remarkable degree. Somewhat composing himself, he wrote a reply, which, before being sent to the press, was read by both Morley and Harcourt. The former also made a rejoinder, a part of which was written in Gladstone's presence, and submitted to him before being published. The only one of the three who sardonically, and in somewhat restless fashion, enjoyed the upset was Harcourt. The author-adapter of the notorious phrase concerning "the Tories stewing in their own Parnellite juice" had for some months before the divorce "lain low," save for a solitary speech ; and, immediately after that event, he adopted an attitude of "I told you so," which proved more than a little irritating to his political associates. But, as one of the most influential among them privately remarked, Harcourt's readiness to occupy Gladstone's place did not quite indicate an equal readiness on Gladstone's part to vacate it.

Many absurd rumours had been in circulation as to the contents of the manifesto, immediately its preparation had become known ; and it was widely reported that it would contain bitter personal attacks on not only Gladstone but Hartington, Chamberlain, and O'Shea. Yet, though these were dispelled when the contents were published, the wording of the manifesto staggered the whole English people. "The net result of this extraordinary document," I at once commented, "can only be to confirm the distrust in which the quondam Irish leader is now generally held. It will be surprising if it makes him a single additional

friend ; it will be astonishing if it does not make him many additional enemies." He had been making them day by day, and the inevitable end became more and more apparent. "Politically speaking, he will die fighting, and some who have known him longest aver that he will struggle to the last, even if he has only one supporter. But that there is a decisive majority against him in his own ranks ; that every one of his lieutenants has declared against his continuance in the leadership ; that the Irish Roman Catholic clergy are increasingly supporting the same view ; and that this view is likewise mainly adopted by the American-Irish, upon whose aid the war-chest depends for sustenance : all these are facts which will prove as stubborn as Mr. Parnell himself, and against which even so hardy a politician will in the long run hurl himself in vain." This was written on the eve of the last gatherings of the old Irish Parliamentary Party as a single body under one head ; and the forecast was fulfilled.

There is no need here to recall in detail the banalities and brutalities—and there was an abundance of both—which marked the progress of that fierce fight in the once notorious and now vanished Committee Room 15. Parnell had determined that immediately the Nationalist members met on that, fateful afternoon of Monday, December 1st, battle should be joined. He began by ruling out of order a motion, "That Mr. Parnell's tenure of the chairmanship of this party is hereby terminated," on the formal ground that it

was not an amendment to the resolution before the meeting when the previous week it had separated. But he allowed one of his supporters to propose that the party should adjourn to Dublin, which he wished adopted because he knew he should there find a more friendly atmosphere. He then received his first check, the forerunner of many, the step he favoured being defeated by 44 votes to 29 ; but with adroitness he at once shifted the issue from his own personal position to the political position of Gladstone. He wanted to entangle the Liberal and Nationalist parties in a discussion over the details of a Home Rule Bill which could not possibly be introduced until after a general election. This might not come for another two years ; and he trusted so to play his cards in the resulting negotiations that the Nationalists, as a body, would once more recognize him as their indispensable chief. But the manœuvre was so obvious that the leading men among his opponents declined to fall into the trap ; and, after a prolonged, undignified, and ineffective wrangle, an adjournment was taken. Yet, from what I had learned of the proceedings in Committee Room 15, I saw the handwriting on the wall. That first night I noted that, though the result was so far undecided, it might be accepted as certain that the majority had decided against Parnell. When I met him in the Lobby, during a short pause in the proceedings, he told me that, if this were to be the verdict, he would appeal to Ireland against it. " I will go on fighting," he said, " and Ireland



will be the battle-ground." He did not profess to forecast the future, but that he felt sure of ultimate victory did not admit of doubt.

"It has been my fortune during the past few years," I that night wrote, "to converse with Mr. Parnell upon many occasions—some of them when matters of great political moment, with which he was specially connected, were trembling in the balance—but at no time upon a subject of more intimate concern to himself than that which filled all men's thoughts to-night. It was immediately after the second adjournment of the Nationalist meeting—that for dinner—and, therefore, just after a gathering in which, while sitting in the chair he has held so long, he had been assailed from within his own ranks as he had never been assailed before, and in which he had returned attack for attack in what even his present opponents, though former friends, acknowledge to have been a fine speech. Yet, beyond a deep flush upon a face customarily extremely pale, the member for 'Cork betrayed not the slightest sign of the agitating time through which he had passed, and more of which still awaited him. He talked with as much ease and coolness as if the matter in suspense were some detail of a land purchase scheme or a reform of local government; and his manner, quite as much as his words, gave the impression of one who was calmly confident that the future had nothing in store that was not successful. There was no affected lightness. There was simply the idea of a resolute belief in a favourable

result of the coming struggle ; and the quietness of it all was not its least striking feature." And my impression of his calm was to be confirmed in a decided way by himself. Writing to Mrs. O'Shea as "My own darling wife," the morning after what to all the rest had proved a thrilling sitting, he incidentally observed, "Meanwhile, I may say that I am exceedingly well, having had twelve hours' sleep last night."

Through two channels, I readily learned of the atmosphere pervading Committee Room 15, one being my old acquaintance, Tuohy, who, as representing the *Freeman's Journal*, had the only journalistic right of entry, and the other Henry Campbell, Parnell's private secretary from the time he became leader of the Nationalist Party in 1880 until his death. Campbell, who had been returned for South Fermanagh, before he was thirty, at the General Election of 1885, was devoted to his chief ; and, from the time he saw how much that chief trusted me, he proved a most useful aid. More than once during the progress of this fierce storm, he almost broke down with emotion when telling me of the insults which were being hurled at Parnell by members who owed to him not only their Parliamentary position but their financial safety. He was one of the most loyal and true private secretaries I ever met at Westminster, and I have known a number deserving thus to be characterized. Leaving the House of Commons within a year after Parnell's death, he in 1893 was chosen Town Clerk of Dublin,

always a Parnellite stronghold, to have later as a fellow Corporation official his hero's elder brother, John. In days long after, his constitutional and legal scruples rendered him *persona ingrata* to the extremists, and he lost his post. It may have been a little consolation that in 1921 he was knighted ; but he died in another three years—thirty-three after the chief he served so well and loved so much.

But, in addition to Campbell, there was a source of information special to myself in the person of Philip Stanhope, long afterwards Lord Weardale, the Radical member of a Conservative family—brother of Salisbury's Secretary for War at the very time—who was then sitting for Wednesbury. Stanhope was a born political wire-puller, and we had been on not merely friendly but confidential terms from the day I entered the Lobby. When battle was joined over the Irish leadership, Stanhope told me that Labouchere—with whom for two or three years he had been closely associated on the Radical Committee, a very active body in this Parliament—was thoroughly tired of Parnell, who, in his opinion, had let the Liberals down badly over the divorce case, and that he was determined to get rid of him. While political flies went on buzzing on the wheel, Labouchere and Stanhope were oiling the axle. For days, it was uncertain whether they could screw up the majority of the Nationalists to fight Parnell to his face ; and night after night, a more public spot for meeting being in the circumstances undesirable, I used to see Stanhope at his club

—the St. James's in Piccadilly, next door to the Savile—and hear him report progress. One night, he gleefully exclaimed, "It's all over: we've got him." And he told how, after much effort, they had so worked on a leading Nationalist's vanity as to ensure his staunchly standing out against Parnell. No one outside knew of these intrigues, and I could only indicate their results and not their progress. But, when Lord Morley published his "Recollections," and seemed to think the whole business was done by "Mr. G.," "J. M.," and "Arnold M.," with an occasional intervention by Harcourt, I met Philip Stanhope, by this time Lord Weardale, in the Commons' Lobby, and we smiled over the recollection of how the thing was really worked.

It is plain that John Morley knew nothing of what was going on underground among his energetic Radical friends, and Labouchere left no record of the transaction. Not a reference to these negotiations appears in his extremely minute biography, monumentally written by a nephew. This is no indication of their non-existence. All who know how intimately that wonderful political intriguer was in touch with every active figure in the life of his day will wonder why Mrs. O'Shea is never once mentioned in that voluminous work, and why the divorce case is altogether ignored. O'Shea is a little more generously treated, but only incidentally and on no more than four occasions. It is casually said that he negotiated

between Gladstone and Parnell in 1881; and it is asserted that the real unwillingness of Parnell to proceed against the *Times* after it had published the first forged letter was that he was firmly convinced O'Shea had been concerned in its production. It is added that Healy told Labouchere during the critical winter of 1885 that "the Kilmainham revelations were let out by Forster and O'Shea"; while, as to the last-named, a quotation is given from a letter to Labouchere from Patrick Egan, in the equally critical winter of three years after, dismissing the charge in two sentences: "I do not believe there is a single thing in the suspicion against O'Shea. . . . The fellow is incapable of playing the rôle of heavy villain." Egan was a shrewd and accurate judge of character—so shrewd and accurate that one would much like to know what further he said about O'Shea in the sentence or sentences omitted by Labouchere's biographer. But, obviously for reasons of his own, Labouchere wanted to say as little as possible about the O'Sheas, while Parnell's deposition from the Irish leadership might never have happened for all the note that "the Christian member for Northampton's" biographer took of it.

But Parnell strongly suspected at the very moment the work against him of these two most effective Radical wirepullers. When I indicated this in print, they explained their action—as far as it could be publicly explained—simply as having waited until after the Irish Party meeting to see whether Parnell

would yield to the manifestly prevailing Liberal opinion, and that it was only when he, by his obstinate attitude, rendered his continued leadership "impossible" that they began, and with such speedy effect, to act. This over-simple explanation Parnell frankly disbelieved. He had the idea, which he indicated in a Tralee speech a month after, that why Labouchere and Stanhope had worked against him was owing to a grudge for his favourable attitude towards a Ministerial Irish Light Railway Bill of fifteen months before. On his declining to change that attitude at their request, as representing the Radical Committee, they retired, he said, in great indignation, "and it is one of the things they have treasured up their sleeve for me from that day to this." While it was a stronger motive than this incident of August, 1889, which determined the Labouchere-Stanhope action in November, 1890, there was something more in that earlier matter than was generally thought. I noted its significance at the moment of its occurrence, by announcing "a distinct soreness between the Radicals and the Nationalists, which even dinners at Mr. Labouchere's cannot allay; and this is finding vent not only in angry comment in the Lobby and fruitless private appeals in the House, but in such an open display as Mr. T. D. Sullivan's denunciation of the Radicals as neither fair, just, nor generous in their opposition to the Bill. Both sections are so restive that cordiality is not likely for some time to be restored. There is a curious lack of sympathy between them, even when ostensibly

working in concert." The basic difference at that point was that the Radicals were resolved to resist all further Treasury assistance to Ireland, while the Nationalists openly disclaimed any concern for the British taxpayer. It was a pretty enough quarrel, but there was more behind Labouchere's later action. His one fixed idea was to defeat the Conservative Government. As long as Parnell was helping the Liberals to do this, he was Parnell's political friend : the moment Parnell proved a hindrance Labouchere determined politically to destroy him : it was a policy which, throughout his wire-pulling, Labouchere not only adopted but avowed.

The proceedings in Committee Room 15 dragged on day after day for a whole week, to the expressed annoyance of the Liberals, who saw that at every turn Parnell was outmanœuvring his Nationalist opponents, and at last reaching a point where he had made it appear that it was not he but Gladstone who was on trial. His opponents played into his hands by their irrepressible verbosity. "All Mr. Parnell wants is time," I noted at the end of the second troubled day ; "and this he has secured by tenaciously holding the chair, and by using his power in that position to encourage his friends and discomfit his enemies. It is with a calm smile that he lets the flow of talk go on unceasingly. He still possesses a reserve of force sufficient to sustain a prolonged, even if not an ultimately victorious, fight on the other side." In the

Lobby during the intervals in the struggle, he treated the trouble made over his own share in the business as a storm in a tea-cup ; smiled at the talk about "deposing the Dictator" ; and expressed the opinion that it was a prolonged fight over a very petty matter. All this, combined with his appearance of cool expectancy that Gladstone would yield to his conditions, irritated the Liberals to distraction. But, as Morley one night said to me, "Mr. G. is accustomed to take his own resolution, and to act upon it." Thus it proved. Gladstone was disposed to meet the majority representatives in a conciliatory spirit, but he stoutly adhered to his determination not to work again with Parnell, declining even to recognize any committee to submit matters to him which included the old leader's name. The Liberal chief thus secured that the interview asked for should be held on his terms and not on Parnell's ; and thereby won a position which enabled the majority of the Nationalist members to take a decisive step. These screwed their courage to the sticking place ; and, after a week of always confused and often vulgar wrangling, they compelled the proceedings to close. Realizing at last that Parnell was using his chairmanship simply to delay a decision, they determined on the Saturday night to withdraw ; and this they did to the number of 45, at once choosing McCarthy as their chairman, twenty-six remaining with Parnell.

The only surprising thing was that the majority had not taken the step earlier, and thus prevented



much loss of dignity as well as temper. A collection of the insults offered and epithets applied during that woeful week would only nauseate now. Even Parnell, in the loss of his temper, was lavish in epithets. Gladstone was not only a "garrulous old gentleman" and "the unrivalled coercionist of the Irish race," but "that grand old spider"; McCarthy was let off mildly as only "a nice young man for a quiet tea-party"; but Healy, as he sat in Committee Room 15, was "that cowardly little scoundrel in the corner"; and Dr. Tanner—an eccentric absurdity, much in evidence when Nationalist members were engaged in some noisy "scene"—was "a gutter sparrow." It was all very scandalous and very pitiable, and it largely helped to ruin the Home Rule cause, which up to a month before had promised to succeed.

Thus, in anger and confusion, the Irish Parliamentary Party broke in pieces. Edward Clarke has told how he once said to David Plunket, afterwards Lord Rathmore, a genial Irish lawyer of the old school, skilled as a Parliamentarian and humorous as an orator, "I knew I was throwing a bombshell into the Irish camp, but I did not know it would do quite so much mischief." "Ah," rejoined Plunket, "you didn't know that, when it burst, they would pick up the pieces and cut each other's throats with them." To myself the matter presented a personal as well as a political aspect. A friend from America asked immediately afterwards what, after all my experiences,

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I thought of Parnell's disastrous drop from power.  
"It was like the fall of a mountain," was my reply ;  
and the devastation which resulted has its evil traces  
even now.

## XII

### DEFEAT AND DEATH

THE Monday following that turbulent Saturday night of December 6th, 1890, found the Nationalist members in a chastened mood, the fierce fighters of the now abandoned Committee Room 15 chatting with each other in their old familiarly friendly way. Though Barry O'Brien has recorded that Parnell in the smoking-room that evening looked "tired, ill, distressed, and absolutely without energy," he showed himself in the Lobby quietly cheerful. The next evening, when the Commons rose for the Christmas, and before travelling to Ireland, he told me he had not the slightest fear of not carrying with him the Irish people. If he were charged with being a Dictator, his reply would be that his only fault—if fault it were—was to have trusted too much to his lieutenants, and to have failed to keep them duly in hand. And he scoffed at the idea that the movement for his deposition had been a sudden uprising of outraged feeling, averring that it had been designed for months, and that only a favourable moment had been awaited for its execution. He left the Lobby to go to Euston, where he was asked by a

*Freeman's Journal* representative, "What message shall I send from you to the Irish people?" "Tell them," was the reply, "that I will fight to the end."

Even within the next few hours, he entered in Dublin on a struggle for which he was physically unfit, and in its course he destroyed the small remainder of a constitution never robust. Having on the night of his arrival addressed a wildly enthusiastic meeting in the Rotunda, he rose early the next morning, and, before starting for Cork, launched personally an attack on the offices of *United Ireland*, which had gone over to his opponents. Finding them barred against him, he followed the example of the Lion Heart at the Gates of Front de Bœuf's castle, and with a crowbar battered his way through the front door; helped to throw out the members of the staff; and pale, dishevelled, covered with dust, presented himself at an upstairs window, and ringingly declared, "I rely on Dublin. Dublin is true. What Dublin says to-day, Ireland will say to-morrow." It was a fatal miscalculation. Though heartily welcomed by his own constituency of Cork, he found the priests against him in Kilkenny, where at a by-contest he put up his first electoral fight. His candidate, despite all Parnell's vigour, was badly beaten; and he later pleaded that he entered on the contest simply as "a protest against the publication of Gladstone's letter." This was the rankling grievance that always remained. "Explain it as they may, that was English dictation." This was the note Parnell struck without ceasing right through the en-

sung nine months' struggle ; but it was not struck in the old strain or with the same effect. Parnell had succeeded by quiet persistence : he failed with physical violence. When Pitt, who went specially to Ireland for the Press Association to describe the opening of the struggle, returned to London, he mournfully told me, " He's not the Parnell you and I have known. That Parnell is dead."

Kilkenny polled on December 22nd, and even earlier Parnell had begun to prepare for recovering by negotiation some share of his old dominating power. O'Brien and Dillon were still in the United States, unable to return to Ireland because of warrants under the Crimes Act being out against them ; and, though they had telegraphically declared themselves opposed to Parnell's continued leadership, there was reason for him to think they could be won back to his side. Accordingly, in the middle of December, he intimated his readiness to meet them " in Europe." He would not accept their suggestion of limiting the place of meeting to Paris ; but, when O'Brien alone returned to France, Parnell consented to see him at Boulogne. There, in the closing days of Parnell's " terrible year," the temporarily notorious " Boulogne Negotiations " began, and wore themselves into weariness. The main object of the preliminary talks, which were suspended on New Year's Eve, was to try and discover some means by which the conflicting Nationalist sections might be reconciled or brought to agreement on a common basis of action ; but it was felt that either

would involve Parnell's at least temporary retirement. The old leader came back to Brighton, but soon returned to Boulogne; and his visits alternated with those of his opponents until the Liberals, who felt that Home Rule was becoming more hopelessly compromised than ever, displayed visible disgust, and threatened to drop the whole thing out of their party's programme if this sort of higgling and haggling continued to drag on.

O'Brien seemed to believe that the breach between the two warring sections could be healed by a truce effected between Parnell and himself; but he had not been present at the face-to-face fight in Committee Room, nor had he taken part in the Kilkenny defeat. The leading men among the Nationalist majority knew that Parnell would never be satisfied until he had heavily punished them for what he considered their treacherous desertion in the hour of need. His opinion of them had been emphatically expressed in public. In private it had been even more vehemently phrased, for he held that his personal, and in some cases his pecuniary, relations with them entitled him to reckon on their absolute acquiescence. These men were strengthened in their attitude by knowing that the bulk of the Liberal Party, though realizing there would be further keen fighting before Parnell owned himself beaten, would not in any circumstances accept a renewal of the alliance with either Parnell or any proxy leader he might choose. It was this which proved fatal to the chances of either O'Brien or Dillon,

the latter coming to France from America in the course of January to take a share in the continuing talks.

The "Boulogne Negotiations" with their intolerable welter of proposal and counter-proposal, dragged their weary length through January; and Parnell, tired of the whole business, went to Avondale and awaited events, John Redmond and Harrington specially visiting him there to bring the latest news from London. Rumour and counter-rumour were rife. While some of the Nationalists were still eager to patch up a peace, Healy in the House was bitterly attacking Parnell, treating him as the ally of the Conservative Government, Parnell indicating his contempt by ignoring the assault and crossing to Ireland to resume his oratorical campaign. He had intended participating in that particular debate, but a telegram from Dublin caused him to leave Westminster in time to catch the evening mail; and the following Sunday he resumed at Ennis his Sunday meetings, which taxed him heavily, and troubled his supporters from a personal point of view as much as his opponents from a political. But even this did not exhaust his apparently boundless but truly feverish stock of energy.

On the Tuesday night following that Ennis meeting of Sunday, February 1st, I was startled, when in the Commons' telegraph office, to meet Parnell looking miserably haggard and worn. I asked whether the journey from Dublin had overtired him, and, with the shadow of his old smile, he replied, "You mean

Calais." "Calais," I exclaimed, thinking at once of the "Negotiations"; "Boulogne." "No," he rejoined, "I am sick of going to Boulogne; and, when O'Brien and Dillon telegraphed urgently on Sunday that they wanted immediately to see me again, I told them to come to Calais, and they came. Sunday at Ennis was heavy, but I crossed from Dublin to London yesterday, and no sooner reached Euston than I drove across London as rapidly as I could, so as to catch the night mail for Calais. I saw them all right, and was in London again to-day." He indicated that, though early in the Boulogne negotiations O'Brien had mooted the idea of their going together to the United States to collect relief funds, he had not entertained it, and had plainly stated at Calais his resolve not to go at that time to America. It was with great caution that he said that "some settlement may early be looked for"; but the only definite thing was that he would for the present address no more meetings in Ireland. His voice, indeed, bore marked traces of the wear and tear caused by so much recent public speaking; and I never saw him look or heard him sound more tired.

But his resolution to remain leader of the Irish party continued unshaken. A compromise had been suggested by which Parnell would have occupied the position for the remainder of the 1891 session, then just begun, and gracefully give way to Dillon in that of 1892, with a virtual standing aside from active public life. It amazed me at the time—it amazes



me as much now—how any who knew his temper could have thought this feasible ; and, on consultation with the most active men of all sections, I wrote two nights after this talk about Calais : “ The question of real importance is whether Mr. Parnell means upon any condition to withdraw from an active participation in Irish political life, and that question I have very little doubt in answering in the negative. It is true that he has temporarily ceased holding meetings in Ireland, but it is equally true that he has declined to entertain the idea of going upon a collecting tour in the United States. It is true that he has offered to lay down such share of the leadership as he retains if certain concessions are obtained from Mr. Gladstone ; but it is equally true that he has never said he would permanently withdraw, while the concessions he seeks have a striking faculty of growth. The fact is that, even if for any reason he ultimately consents to stand aside, he will, I can positively state, continue to attend at Westminster, and what this means does not need any extraordinary penetration to grasp. The member for Cork believes, in short, that he has been badly served by those upon whom he had the best right to count ; and he is not likely, in order to make their political path more smooth, to waive the duty he considers he owes to Ireland by absenting himself from Parliament during a session in which an Irish Land Bill is being discussed and an Irish Local Government Bill is promised. When considering the prospects of the situation, therefore, his intention

in this regard may prove one of its most powerful factors."

"In the blaze of assertion and counter-assertion, 'authorized statement' and equally authorized 'contradiction' which continues to play around the Nationalist negotiations, a degree of discreet scepticism is to be recommended," I wrote at this time. "It is rash to say anything even upon presumably competent authority, because an authority of equal competence will of a certainty the next moment deny it." But the suspicion entertained by informed onlookers that Parnell did not really desire a settlement gradually grew among those Nationalists who were working hardest for a compromise which would ensure his falling to the rear. It was strengthened by the gradual increase of knowledge as to the terms he at one time and another during the negotiations had proposed as a condition precedent to his withdrawal from the leadership. One was that he should be allowed to nominate all the Nationalist candidates at the next election; and, when this was refused, he suggested, with like lack of success, fifty as the number he should choose. The terms he proposed and were rejected were of far more interest, indeed, than any that were likely to be taken; and, after all the tangled talk, my belief that Parnell would not agree to any terms that would commend themselves to the majority of his old party was justified to the full.

In the middle of February, and on the very eve of a meeting of the anti-Parnellite members at which it had

been hoped at least a truce of some sort would be arranged, Parnell authorized me to say that the negotiations between the warring factions had utterly broken down, and that the rupture was complete. He emphatically disowned responsibility for this, saying, "I stand on precisely the same platform as I did in Committee Room 15 ; I have adhered throughout to the conditions I there laid down as precedent to the withdrawal from the Nationalist leadership ; I have not added to them a single one ; and, as they have not been fulfilled, I am constrained by my loyalty to Ireland to stand my ground." He added that he had waited for ten days since his visit to Calais for a further movement on the part of O'Brien and Dillon, showing his terms to have been accepted, but that, as there had been none, he had no alternative but to break off the negotiations. The first consequence was the coming back the next day of O'Brien and Dillon to England, where they were promptly arrested, with the idea of returning them to Clonmel Prison for six months—at the end of which period, as Parnell calmly informed me, he expected them to rally emphatically to his side, as they had shown tentative signs of doing before leaving Boulogne. During their stay in France, the authorities had taken striking steps to prevent their reaching England without detection. Not a journey had been made across the Channel by Parnell or any other leading Nationalist that was not reported to the police in London and Dublin ; and detectives at Dover and the several

metropolitan termini of the railways running to it kept strict watch for the arrival of the "wanted" members. Six London detectives, all of long experience and trained in political affairs, were meantime at Boulogne, as it was thought O'Brien and Dillon would leave France for some locality more convenient of access. The authorities here were determined to keep themselves posted with their movements; and, if they had left Boulogne, their watchers would have sailed on the same boat, ready to arrest them immediately they were within British waters. But the end was tame. There was no secret flight: there was almost ostentatious surrender.

Parnell's idea, when he broke off the "Boulogne Negotiations," was that he would win a balance of twelve Nationalist seats, which, added to his existing strength, would secure more than an absolute majority of the whole Party. And, with a view to such a victory, he told me the night of the final breach that he intended recommencing at the earliest possible date his platform campaign in Ireland, and carrying the war into England by holding later in the year a series of meetings in London and the North, where the Irish vote was strong. But it was promptly made plain that he was not to have all the fighting to himself, steps being taken to organize the anti-Parnellite forces in Ireland, their leaders believing that the Parnellite section would almost be swept out of the field, its opponents securing seventy or even more seats. Yet Parnell's calm confidence in future success was at this

moment most marked. While organizing a full development of his campaign in Ireland, he was resolved to remain in active Parliamentary work. He told me he was better and stronger, despite all the turmoils and journeyings, than he had been for years, and he looked forward, not to one session in the House of Commons, but several. "Whether any of the seceders will return to my side," he added, "I don't know; but I am confident I have with me the majority of the people of Ireland."

It was in this hopeful mood he crossed to Dublin in the middle of February, 1891; but he never had reason to be as hopeful again. Rebuff followed rebuff with pitiless persistency. He was so tireless in his energy as to alarm his friends, who warned him of the certain result; but he hated the suggestion of unfitness to stand the continuous strain. More than once, when he would pass through the Lobby that spring and summer, looking harassed and weary and unlike his old self, he assured me he was enjoying the fight. Justin McCarthy, with whom he had resumed friendly personal relations, exclaimed to him one evening, "Parnell, are you not overdoing this? No constitution can stand the work you are going through." "I like it," he replied. "It is doing me a lot of good"—the last words his old friend heard him speak. "I am doing the work of ten men," he told another intimate; "but it does me good." It was not only the worry but constant defeat that brought him down. North Sligo saw him beaten at a by-election in the

April and Carlow in the July ; and between these on June 25th, and as soon as possible after the divorce decree had been made absolute, he married Katharine O'Shea, in the little Sussex registry office of Steyning. But this inevitably was too late to affect the current of feeling in Great Britain, while it hardened it in Ireland, even the long-faithful *Freeman's Journal* dropping away. According to the one who was now his wife, they occupied their marriage evening in sitting by the sea and talking of the future, " when Ireland had settled down, and my King—King, indeed, in forcing reason upon that unreasonable land, and wresting the justice of Home Rule from England—could abdicate ; when we would go away to a better climate, so that his health might become all I wished. We talked of the summer visits we would make to Avondale, and of the glorious days when he never need go away from me, of the time when his hobbies could be pursued to the end, instead of broken off for political work. . . . Yet as we sat together, silent now, even though we spoke together still with the happiness that has no words, a storm came over the sea. It had been very hot all day, and a thunderstorm was inevitable ; but, as we sheltered under the breakwater, I wished that this one day might have been without a storm."

Singularly little attention to the marriage was given by politicians at Westminster when the news became known ; and it was treated as a purely domestic incident, having no particular outside concern, the

English people being thoroughly wearied by the Irish factionist disputes. Parnell himself seemed disposed at the moment to treat it as of no special importance, sending notice the day afterwards to the Speaker that he would put two very ordinary Irish questions to Balfour, as Chief Secretary, on the following Monday, but I gave a caution on the Sunday night that he might not be in his place, and the queries were asked by Richard Power, one of his whips. But, cool though was the feeling evoked in Great Britain, it rose to fever heat in Ireland. There the Roman Catholic hierarchy were roused to even greater wrath. Archbishop Walsh of Dublin became a more embittered foe. Archbishop Croke of Cashel, Parnell's faithful friend in the early days of the agitation, when faithful friendship in such a quarter was little to be looked for, renewed the condemnation of Parnell's conduct he had felt bound to pass soon after the divorce. Even the younger Catholic curates, almost always the bitterest of the anti-English, deserted Parnell after a marriage so deeply repugnant to the teachings of their Church. His political doom from that hour was never in doubt ; but he went on fighting—ceaselessly fighting—as if resolved to tear himself asunder.

Parnell's widow long afterwards said that, through all these fighting months in Ireland, he was in no way unhappy, but that the insidious "tiredness" which grew upon him foreshadowed the end. While enjoying the stress of the battle, he sighed for a respite, but

would not give way. Week-end after week-end he spent in Ireland, making speech upon speech, receiving insult upon insult, and being hindered and hampered as surely by the jealousies of his friends as by the attacks of his foes. "This dispute somewhat impedes progress and increases the difficulties," was the quiet remark to his wife concerning one of these personal quarrels, as to which Parnellite should have the largest share in the management of a new paper. "The trouble about the jealousies of would-be directors on the new board still continues," he wrote a week later ; and, when it was temporarily composed, and he returned to his English home, he was looking so worn out and ill as thoroughly to alarm the one he loved best. But he felt bound to go on with his Irish work. The petty jealousies of his journalistic staff continued to give trouble ; and at length, in latest September, it seemed as if the fatal breakdown would take place in Dublin in the midst of these ignoble woes. He appears at last to have realized how serious was his state. "I want to go home ; I must go home," he said to those who pressed him to rest a few days in Dublin. His wish was granted, and he came home, only in a few days to die.

Sir Henry Thompson, the leading physician of his time, had been previously consulted ; and in Parnell's very last letter, written on October 3rd, he stated his condition, plainly describing his symptoms and showing in his handwriting no traces of suffering. Thompson, without thinking the case so serious, advised him to



call in a local practitioner, but this had already been done. When the end came, the great physician wrote to the widow : " He wanted no medicine to combat the complaint. He wanted physical force, increased vitality to keep the attack at bay. . . . Acts of prudence and foresight very few ardent men of action ever find time to take. Nevertheless it is then that advice is really efficient." The end now swiftly came ; Parnell suffered more and more pain ; on the night of October 6th, he fell into a stupor in which he was heard to murmur " The Conservative Party " ; and, having in a last flicker exclaimed to his wife, " Kiss me, and I will try to sleep a little," his heart's action suddenly failed, and he passed away in her arms.

" I am weary, dear mother, of these troubles," he had said in one of his last letters, " weary unto death ; but it is all in a good cause. With health and the assistance of my friends, I am confident of the result." But neither the health nor the assistance was given, and the confidence was wrecked. Few outside his intimates knew he was ill. Ten days before his death, when in Dublin, he had written to Dr. Kenny, an Irish member who throughout had been his staunch and trusted friend, asking him to call, as he was not feeling very well ; but, he added, " Don't mention that I am unwell to anybody, lest it should get into the newspapers." He was suffering apparently from general debility and rheumatism so acute that he had to carry his arm in a sling. Kenny strongly advised him to abandon an open air meeting at Creggs, but he

determined to go. At this, which was the last he ever addressed, he spoke in the rain, forbidding an umbrella to be held over him. He stayed at Kenny's house for three days, talking business and becoming worse; and, as he lay on a sofa discussing the situation, he spoke hopefully of the future. "It is only a matter of time," he said; "the fight may be long or short, but we will win in the end." On the night of September 30th, he left Ireland for the last time, refusing to heed Kenny's assurance that he was unfit to travel. "I shall be all right," said Parnell; "I shall come back on Saturday week." These were his last words on Irish soil; and the pledge was kept. On the promised Saturday week, October 10th, he came back to Ireland, to be laid at rest at Glasnevin, the Dublin cemetery in which Daniel O'Connell, his greatest predecessor in the Irish leadership, likewise sleeps.

It has been said of Tom Moore by a recent admiring critic, "He was an Englishman's idea of what an Irishman should be"; and this probably accounts for the contempt—and not always the genial contempt—into which he fell in Ireland. Of Parnell, and especially in the formative years of his parliamentary career, it could as appropriately be said, "He was an Englishman's idea of what an Irishman should not be." Boucicault had taught the crowd, from the days of "Arrah-na-Pogue" to "The Shaughraun"—this last of his pseudo-Irish plays being produced at Drury Lane a few months after Parnell's first return to

Parliament—that Irish patriots were picturesque and voluble persons, always with heart on sleeve, tears ready to spring, and voice eager for action. There were still living those who could recall Daniel O’Connell and who saw before them Isaac Butt, both Irish leaders who in full degree embodied various of these qualities. It was no wonder the British public were puzzled and even pained when a descendant of the old Anglo-Irish squirearchy, educated at Cambridge, and an office-holder in the recently disestablished Episcopal Church, not only came into Parliament as a Home Ruler, but at once closely associated himself with what they regarded as a band of Irish members resolved on making the House of Commons as vulgar and rowdy as themselves. And, so far from this strange portent being picturesque, sentimental, and loquacious, he was taciturn, morose, and, at the outset, not far short of inarticulate. Decidedly, Parnell was “an Englishman’s idea of what an Irishman should not be.”

It was an idea shared at the moment by many Irishmen, and even by the majority of the Home Rule members themselves. No one could have seemed less likely to lead them when he started on his Parliamentary career. The Irish representatives supporting Home Rule were content to do so by voting for Butt’s annual resolution. Most of them were English as much as Irish in their feelings and associations; and, though mainly Liberal in their party sympathies, they were ready to bargain with any British Govern-

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ment, Liberal or Conservative, which showed a readiness to meet some local or national claim to Treasury aid. They shrank as visibly from political as from Parliamentary force; and their London clubs and dining-rooms were more to their taste than public meetings and torchlight processions. Save at rare intervals, they mingled little in Irish affairs, and to the old Fenian as well as the young Nationalist they were anathema. But Parnell took his own haughty, aloof, and inscrutable line from the very first, even, when it suited him, disdaining to reply to personal attacks of the most envenomed description. Warned by the failure of Butt to make any deep and sustained impression on English feeling by constant courtesy and willingness to oblige, Parnell deliberately adopted a policy the exact reverse. This was not only on such a matter as parliamentary obstruction, but in the contempt he showed for British opinion. When Forster, after Kilmainham and the Phoenix Park, virtually charged him in the House of Commons with connivance at murder, he simply ignored the accusation, and, by disdainfully repudiating any interference by Englishmen in what affected the Irish leadership, made his dominance over Nationalist opinion more sure. He again tried this policy over the forged letters, but then with smaller effect until he was backed by visible proof. When, during the last struggle of all, he tried it a third time over the divorce decree, and flouted not only English opinion but Irish beliefs, the weapon broke in his hand, and pierced him to the death.

Superstition and hypochondria gravely affected at all times his mental outlook. He was one of the most superstitious of men, a fact which, being a Protestant, he once smilingly attributed to having had a Roman Catholic nurse. He would not enter a railway compartment or a chamber numbered thirteen or any multiple of that figure ; if anyone passed him the salt at dinner, he would at once leave the table, and he never spilled salt without "crossing" it ; when, in their eagerness to demonstrate their delight at his coming to one of his latest meetings, a crowd broke the windows of his carriage, his face fell, for he always thought it unlucky to break glass ; and, on the night of the last meeting of all, he was shocked to find himself expected to pass a friend on the hotel stairs, for this was unlucky too. Much of Parnell's hypochondria was due to heredity, but much to long periods of ill-health. During the sittings of the Special Commission, he took a severe cold on the chest, and, leaving the House early one evening, he remarked to me as he went, "I should not have minded a cold like this before the last two years, but since then my health has been very precarious." In the last summer of his life, he told me that he felt somewhat stronger, but his looks belied him ; and the strain of the fight over the leadership and the many meetings he attended in Ireland was marked severely upon him. Both physically and to some extent mentally, he was not the same man after the split ; and Bright's disease, from which he suffered, was a depressing trouble

never to be overcome. The marvel is that, with all his illnesses—most of them kept from public knowledge by his own keen desire, and through some of the worst of which he was nursed by Mrs. O'Shea—he lasted so long ; but the end was bound to come. His life had been a fitful fever : even his most determined enemies cannot have grudged him his final sleep.

That because of a fevered and frenzied love he ruined his reputation, shattered his party, and deeply injured the country he had sought to serve, was a political as well as a personal tragedy which has seldom been matched. The mixture of the great and the small, the petty and the powerful, which marked Parnell in his parliamentary as in his private life, is not explicable by ordinary formulas. During our acquaintance, he often puzzled me greatly : as I look back upon it, I am puzzled still : but I remember much in him that I admired, and I have always been glad to have known him so well.

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